QANTAS SOCCEROOS v PARAGUAY

QANTAS

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2010, SYDNEY FOOTBALL STADIUM

THE SOCCEROO

AUSTRALIA

ISSUE 18 $10

LATIN FLAIR

All you need to know about Paraguay

TAKING CHARGE

Qantas Socceroos coach Holger Osieck has a history of success

THE GOAL KING

Tim Cahill becomes Australia's all-time leading FIFA World Cup goalscorer

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Media Operations Manager, Men's National Teams
Adam Mark

FFA Senior Manager, Sponsorship, Licensing and Broadcasting
Peter Seiberras

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The Slattery Media Group

Publisher
Geoff Slattery

Editor
John Murray

Designers
Beck Haskins, Oliver Newbery

Creative Director
Andrew Hutchison

Art Director
Sam Russell

Contributors
Ashley Browne, Michael Lynch, Aidan Ormond

Sub-Editor
Nick Horton

Photo Editors
Natalie Boccassini, Ginny Pike

Production Manager
Tony Davis

Production Coordinator
Stephen Lording

Distribution Manager
Adele Morton

Commercial Manager
Shane Purra

Account Managers
Kate Hardwick, Rebecca Whiting

Advertising Sales Coordinator
Laura Mullins

Advertising
(03) 9627 2600

Photography
Getty Images

Printed by
PhilPrint

Address correspondence to
The Editor, The Socceroo,
Ground Floor,
140 Harbour Esplanade,
Docklands, Victoria, 3008.
P (03) 9627 2600
F (03) 9627 2650
Knickb@slatterymedia.com

All statistics correct up to October 4, 2010.

All times and dates listed are Australian Eastern Standard Time unless otherwise stated

AUSTRALIA

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Homecoming Dream
More and more Australians are turning their backs on Europe to return home.

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Brett Holman was one of the Qantas Socceroos' best at the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

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Welcome Paraguay

FFA Chairman Frank Lowy AC

Tonight's welcome home match for the Qantas Socceroos is another important step in the side's development under new coach Holger Osieck.

Welcome to the Sydney Football Stadium for the Qantas Socceroos welcome home match against Paraguay.

This is the first match that the Qantas Socceroos will play in Australia since the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Although we were not able to advance to the knockout stage of the tournament, our boys performed admirably well in a very difficult group and did all of us proud. I am sure that the experience gained and lessons learned will be extremely valuable to us as we prepare for the upcoming AFC Asian Cup in Qatar next January and the qualification process for the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

Tonight we welcome to Australia our new head coach Holger Osieck for his first match in charge of the Qantas Socceroos at home. As I have mentioned previously, Holger's credentials are a perfect fit for us and we are all very excited about our prospects as we look towards rebuilding and rejuvenating our national team for the future.

We also welcome back to our shores our very good friends from Paraguay. It is always an honour to have such a great football nation meet the Qantas Socceroos and we hope that their stay in Australia is enjoyable and memorable. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate our guests on their fine performance at the 2010 FIFA World Cup where they made the quarter-finals only to be narrowly knocked out by the eventual champions, Spain.

Hosting matches against such quality opposition as Paraguay shows how the global nature of football can bring people and cultures closer together.

In December we will know whether our bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Australia has been successful.

This will be the culmination of two years hard work by our dedicated bid team and partners on behalf of all Australia.

Should Australia receive the honour of hosting the biggest and most exciting sporting event in the world, the legacy for football and fans across the country will be enormous and I am sure that football fans from all over the world would welcome such a decision to "Come Play" here in Australia.

In closing I would like to thank all our partners for their ongoing support, in particular the NSW Government and Events NSW for making tonight's match possible.

My best wishes to both teams for what I am sure will be a competitive and enjoyable match for all.

FRANK LOWY AC, CHAIRMAN
FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIA

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A Warm Welcome Home

Hon. Kristina Keneally MP

What better place for a homecoming as the Qantas Socceroos prepare for the AFC Asian Cup 2011 in Qatar.

I join with countless other football fans in welcoming our Qantas Socceroos back to Sydney after the 2010 FIFA World Cup finals.

They played bravely and well. And what better place for a homecoming than Australia's global city and football capital, as they prepare for the AFC Asian Cup 2011 in Qatar next January.

A warm welcome, too, to their worthy opponents in tonight's game, Paraguay, who topped their group in South Africa only to be eliminated in the quarter-finals by the eventual champion, Spain.

My Government continues to support Australia's bids to secure the 2015 AFC Asian Cup and the 2022 FIFA World Cup, with all that would mean for the prestige of football in this country and the economic and tourism benefits that would flow to the nation as a whole.

Tonight's match coincides with the Crave Sydney International Food Festival, featuring some of the biggest names on the world food scene. The centrepiece is Breakfast on the Bridge, with a football theme this year to support our bid for the FIFA World Cup.

May I suggest to all our visitors that while in Sydney they experience our culinary attractions as well as our football prowess. And to both tonight's teams, congratulations on your successes and best wishes for the future.

HON. KRISTINA KENEALLY MP
PREMIER OF NEW SOUTH WALES

KICK OFF

The latest Australian football news at home and abroad.

QANTAS SOCCEROOS

KICKING GOALS
Australia's Football United side finished fourth in the Festival for Hope tournament in South Africa.

Football Matters

Latest news from inside the FFA.

FOOTBALL UNITED MOVING FORWARD FOLLOWING THE FESTIVAL FOR HOPE!

Australia had a second team competing in South Africa recently, Football United, which is back from a successful showing in the Festival for Hope tournament and continuing to forge ahead with new and exciting adventures.

The team placed an admirable fourth in the top division of the tournament, narrowly failing to qualify for the semi-finals. An inspiring two-part documentary film following the team as it prepared for and travelled to South Africa was broadcast recently on Foxtel. The documentary, produced by North One Television, is a lovely roller-coaster ride that inspires and motivates. Foxtel will be replaying the program throughout the year, so if you missed it keep an eye out for further showings.

In addition to this inspiring film, Football United is continuing its national development programs, with the support of Football Federation Australia (FFA) and many state and local groups. The Queensland program was first to get going, with the Shinpads and Hijabs, supported by Q-Connect, Multicultural Affairs Queensland, Brisbane Roar, Football Queensland and many local groups. To find out what is happening in your state, visit *FootballUnited.org.au*.

COMMUNITY STREET SOCCER PROGRAM

The Big Issue Australia's Community Street Soccer Program uses sport as a mechanism to engage homeless and marginalised people and promote social inclusion. It involves males and females, of different ages and varying ability and fitness levels, getting together once a week, training and playing matches.

The heart of the Community Street Soccer Program is weekly training sessions at permanent pitches located in underprivileged communities across Australia, where playing equipment and a dedicated soccer coach are provided. Participants get fit, make new friends and seek support and advice.

The Big Issue welcomes the support of FFA in raising the profile of grassroots community sport in our communities. To learn more about the Community Street Soccer Program and how *The Big Issue* provides life changing opportunities for homeless and marginalised Australians visit *thebigissue.org.au*.

UNICEF

Approximately 20.5 million people – equivalent to almost the whole population of Australia – have been affected by Pakistan's worst floods in living memory. The scale of the catastrophe is simply overwhelming. More people are affected than the combined total of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, 2005 Kashmir earthquake and the 2010 Haiti earthquake. According to the UN at least nine million children have been affected.

UNICEF has increased its response and is now providing more than 2.5 million people clean water every day. A further million people are accessing food and thousands of health workers are delivering urgent health care assistance.

Children remain particularly susceptible due to their vulnerability to diarrhoea, dysentery and skin diseases which are increasingly prevalent.

"Of the nine million children affected more than 3.5 million of them are children under five years old," said Norman Gillespie, UNICEF Australia Chief Executive. "These young kids are particularly vulnerable as if they contract what is normally an easily treatable disease such as diarrhoea, and we do not get treatment to them quickly, it can rapidly turn into a very serious situation."

LENDING A HAND
UNICEF is at the forefront of the Pakistan flood relief efforts.

Please help UNICEF reach more vulnerable children and their families.

Donations to the UNICEF Pakistan Flood Children's Appeal can be made at *unicef.org.au* or by calling 1300 884 233.

AUSTRALIA'S BID WELCOMES PwC

The bid to bring the greatest show on earth, the FIFA World Cup, to Australia in 2022 has received an extra boost with Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) coming on board as the official professional services partner to Australia's bid.

PwC has been a strong supporter of football and Australia's bid since 2007 by providing ongoing economic analysis, financial, advisory and legal services.

"We are delighted to officially welcome PwC to our football family as we head into this important phase of our bidding campaign," said FFA CEO Ben Buckley.

"PwC will continue to be instrumental in building our case and helping us show FIFA that a FIFA World Cup in Australia would be good for football, good for Australia and good for the world."

Joseph Carrozzi, PwC Sydney Managing Partner, said: "Hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup will provide a major catalyst to the growth of football in Australia. It also has the potential to boost employment, drive tourism and provide strong stimulus for the economy."

"Our team has been working with the FFA over the last three years. We are extremely encouraged by the FFA's level of energy, leadership and commitment to securing the 2022 FIFA World Cup, and the continued growth of football in Australia.

"Australia has a well-earned reputation for the successful hosting of international events. Our bid for the FIFA World Cup demonstrates the nation's ability to organise and deliver excellence. We look forward to continuing to work with the FFA team to bring this bid home."

FIFA's 24 executive members will select a host for the 2022 FIFA World Cup at the home of FIFA in Zurich on December 2, 2010.

For more information about Australia's bid, visit *australiabid.com.au*.

SECOND CHANCE Australia gets a chance to avenge its FIFA World Cup loss to Germany and Bastian Schweinsteiger, right, in a friendly next March.

News Bites

What's been making headlines on and off the field since last issue.

BREAKFAST ON THE BRIDGE

From 6.30am tomorrow one of Australia's most famous icons, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, will turn into the world's best picnic spot.

For the second year in a row, the Sydney Harbour Bridge will be closed and green grass rolled out along the road deck for 6000 lucky Sydneysiders to sit and enjoy a picnic breakfast.

This year's Breakfast on the Bridge has a football theme to support Australia's bid for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Football players, as well as members of Football United, will attend the opening celebrations.

"Breakfast on the Bridge is the centrepiece of the Crave Sydney International Food Festival, which offers 31 days of extraordinary food experiences throughout October," NSW Minister for Major Events Kevin Greene said.

"It is sure to be a fantastic morning of picnics and football, and a chance to enjoy the beauty of Sydney with friends and family."

Crave Sydney International Food Festival offers something for everyone: large-scale food events; intimate dinners cooked by some of the world's leading chefs; authentic food experiences across Sydney's culturally diverse suburbs; and family and free activities on our harbour islands.

For more information check out *cravesydneyfoodfestival.com.au*.

WE MEET AGAIN

The Qantas Socceroos will get the chance to exact revenge on their 2010 FIFA World Cup nemesis Germany after it was confirmed last month that the nations would meet in a friendly next March.

The match will be played at Borussia-Park in Monchengladbach on March 29, 2011, and will mark the return of Australian coach Holger Osieck to his native country.

"This will be a very special match and a great opportunity to test ourselves against a very well-respected opponent," Osieck said. "The German national team has a very rich and successful football history with a very talented group of current players.

"But I am confident our players will be up for the challenge against such quality opposition."

Germany has won all three previous meetings between the teams, including the 4-0 thrashing in South Africa in June.

FFA chief executive Ben Buckley believed the Qantas Socceroos would be keen to make amends for that result.

"As we saw at the FIFA World Cup in South Africa, Germany is one of the best teams in the world," he said. "I'm sure that all our boys and all Australian supporters will be looking forward to this rematch since our last result against Germany was not very favourable."

RISING STARS

While the Qantas Socceroos were taking on the world's best in South Africa, their younger counterparts did the nation proud in the Asean Football Federation (AFF) U-19 Championship in Vietnam.

The Qantas Young Socceroos beat Thailand 1-0 in July's final to take out their second title in just three years. In the process, they exacted revenge on their opponents who beat them in a penalty shootout at the same stage 12 months earlier.

Coach Jan Versleijen was full of praise for his players after the game.

"Thailand made things difficult for us once again. They are a very disciplined side and have a few excellent technical players," he said.

"Credit must go to not only the players but to the whole staff, as to win this championship we had to play four tough games in seven days in hot and humid conditions."

The Qantas Young Socceroos won their second Asean Football Federation U-19 Championship in three years this July.

SOCCEROOS SLIP

The Qantas Socceroos dropped from 20th to 24th when FIFA released the latest update to the Men's world rankings on September 15.

Norway, Slovakia, Ghana and Turkey all soared up the list. Australia is sandwiched between Ivory Coast and Russia, but still remains the top-ranked team in Asia with Japan in 30th position.

World champion Spain stayed at the top of the rankings, ahead of the Netherlands and Germany, which leapfrogged Brazil into third. England moved up one spot to sixth, while Italy dropped to 13th. Former European heavyweight France sunk a further six spots to 27th.

New Zealand climbed five places to 49th, within five of its best ranking.

The next FIFA world rankings will be released on October 20.

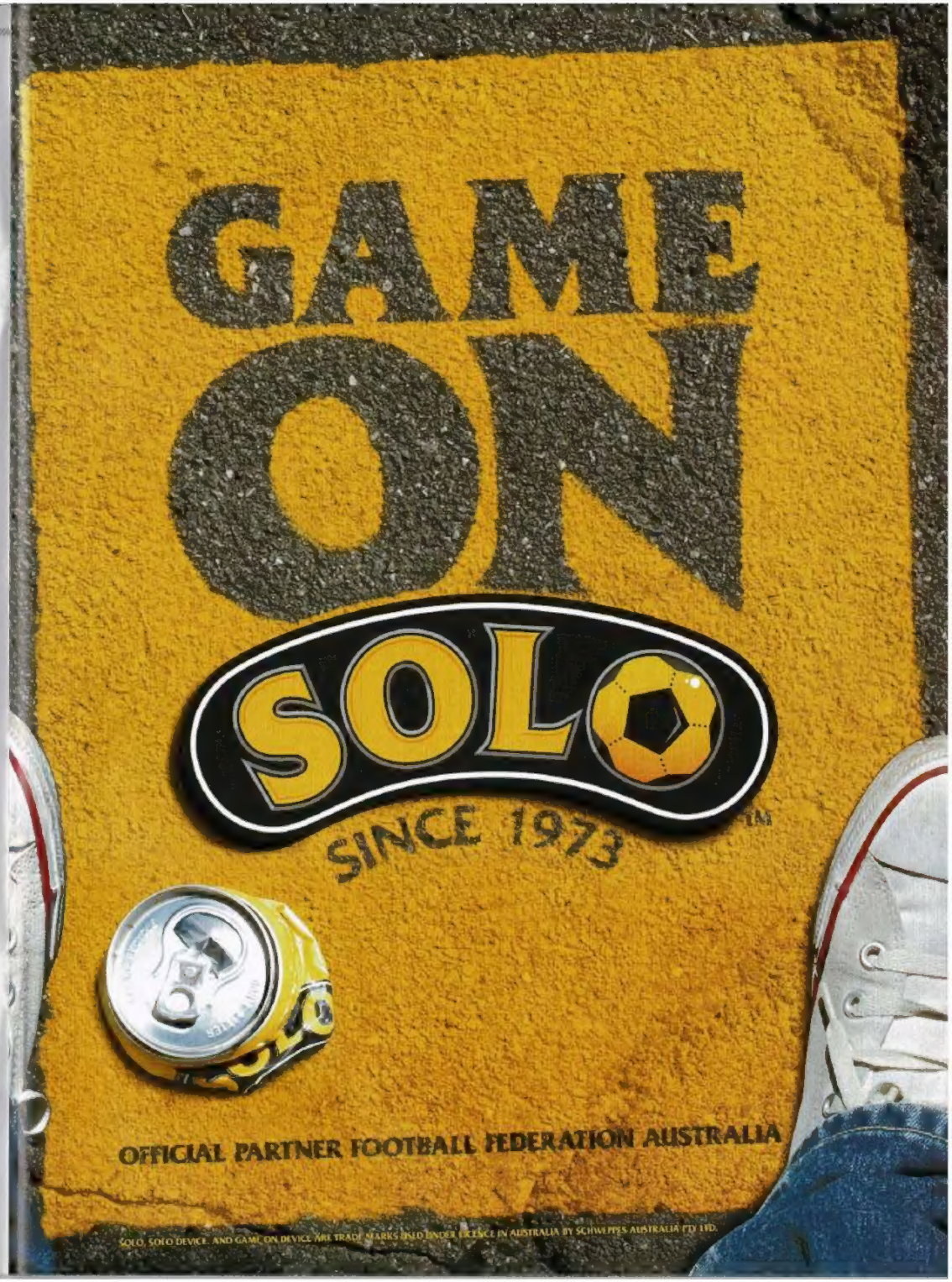
HEART BEATS

August 13 was a historic day in the history of the Hyundai A-League when Melbourne Heart played its first official game.

The competition's newest team took on Newcastle Jets at Energy Stadium Australia, earning a 1-1 draw. Unfortunately, the honour of scoring the Heart's first goal fell to Jet Ben Kantarovski, whose own goal levelled proceedings with 10 minutes remaining.

Two weeks later, John van't Schip's side made its debut appearance in front of 5878 fans at AAMI Park. Robbie Fowler denied the home supporters a day to remember when his goal in injury time secured a 2-2 draw for Perth Glory.

However the following weekend, the Heart finally broke their duck with a 1-0 win over North Queensland Fury, with Nick Kalmar grabbing the game's only goal after 11 minutes.



INTERNATIONAL SERVICE

He might not yet be a household name in Australia, but Holger Osieck brings strong credentials to the Qantas Socceroos coaching job. BY MICHAEL LYNCH

It seems that a crucial part of the job description for any new Qantas Socceroos coach is to have served with distinction as the No. 2 to a managerial legend in earlier FIFA World Cups and then to have been a senior coach who has led a country to the latter stages of a major regional tournament.

If that's the case, then recently appointed Australian No. 1 Holger Osieck certainly fits the criteria.

Like his predecessor Pim Verbeek, Osieck worked as an assistant to one of the best known coaching figures in the football world. Where Verbeek was at Guus Hiddink's shoulder when the Dutch duo took Korea Republic on its improbable run to the 2002 FIFA World Cup semi-finals, Osieck can boast even greater credentials.

The 62-year-old German was in the managerial dugout as an assistant coach alongside none other than 'Der Kaiser' – Franz Beckenbauer – when he coached West Germany to glory in the 1990 FIFA World Cup.

Whereas Verbeek eventually took control of the emerging football power that is Korea Republic on his own and led it to the semi-finals of the AFC Asian Cup 2007, Osieck again went one better, arguably with less promising material.

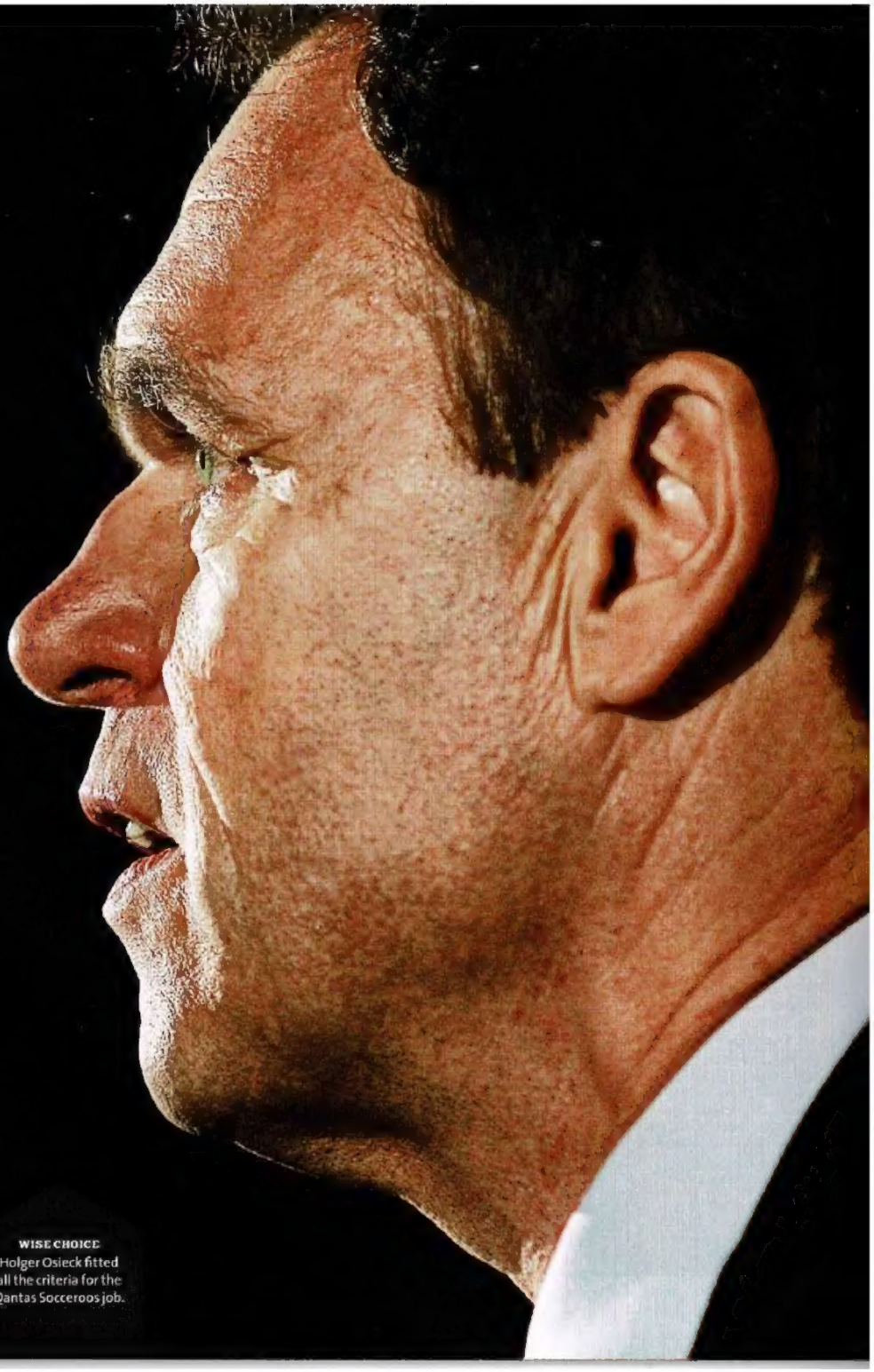
Having taken charge of Canada in 1999, he led the Canucks to their first and only major tournament triumph in the 2000 CONCACAF Gold Cup when they claimed the region's equivalent of the AFC Asian Cup.

The team, not surprisingly, earned the appellation of 'Holger's Heroes' from delighted Canadian fans and media as they defeated regional powerhouse Mexico in the quarter-finals and beat guest nation Colombia 2-0 in the final. So Osieck ticks the right boxes in terms of international coaching experience, knowledge he furthered in recent years when he was part of FIFA's Technical Study Group (TSG), evaluating club and international games from a tactical and technical perspective. It was a job which kept him up to speed with the analysis of international football, not just in his home continent of Europe but all over the world. During the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa he was a contributor to the FIFA website, commenting on developing trends in the game and producing reports on particular matches.

While never a hugely successful player (he was with Gelsenkirchen-based Bundesliga club Schalke 04 in his early days before playing at lower-league level in Germany and Canada), Osieck always knew coaching might be his forte.

And with a typically Teutonic sense of organisation he finished a university degree in humanities and social sciences and then set out to pass all his coaching exams, securing the highest available qualification at the German Sport University, Cologne, in 1976.

The following year, at the age of 29, he became assistant to the Canadian national team before returning to his homeland two years later to join the German Football Association (known as the DFB) as a youth coach on the general staff. As he progressed up the ranks he became more in demand, and before and during the 1990 FIFA World Cup he was assistant to head coach Beckenbauer, who, although one of the all-time playing greats, had no official coaching qualifications.



WISE CHOICE
Holger Osieck fitted all the criteria for the Qantas Socceroos job.

WORLD BEATER

There haven't been too many FIFA World Cup winners who have come to work in Australia's developing football scene. Most prefer to stay in the centre of the football world – Europe – or remain in South America.

German Pierre Littbarski was one of this select band, leading Sydney FC to the Hyundai A-League championship in its debut season. Brazilian midfielder Juninho was another, the little man from Sao Paolo enduring an injury-plagued season in 2007-08 with Sydney FC when signed as its marquee player. His countryman Romario, meanwhile, made a handful of cameo appearances for Adelaide United in 2006-07. And that's about it.

Osieck is the first FIFA World Cup-winning coach to be in control of the Qantas Socceroos, having been an assistant when West Germany defeated Argentina 1-0 through an Andreas Brehme penalty in 1990.

"What can you say about something like that? For your country to win the most prestigious trophy in football and you have the chance to be involved in some capacity, it's a very special feeling," he says when asked if he can remember the emotion he felt that day.

"Franz (Beckenbauer) and I had a good relationship which still lasts until today. There was a great deal of respect ... we got along pretty well. He was unique as a footballer and he is unique as a person, and when you have the opportunity to work with someone of that personality, then I think you are very privileged.

"Looking back on that time, we had some strong characters in our team and that made a big difference."

DYNAMIC DUO Franz Beckenbauer, left, and Osieck led West Germany to success in the 1990 FIFA World Cup.

After Germany's triumph in Italy, he stayed with his friend Beckenbauer, the duo moving to France where they had a period in charge of Olympique Marseille. Osieck first took up a head coaching position on his own with Bundesliga club Vfl Bochum in 1991, and had spells in charge of Istanbul giant Fenerbahce, Japan's largest club Urawa Red Diamonds, and Kocaelispor, again in Turkey.

It was with Urawa (during his second stint in charge) that he had his greatest club triumph, capturing the 2007 AFC Champions League trophy, eliminating the Branko Culina-coached Sydney FC along the way.

So, on paper, Osieck, while perhaps an unexpected appointment, looks like a wise choice. He has big game know-how, has been successful at the highest level, has taken a country in a developing football nation to a hugely unexpected triumph and has won one of the biggest club competitions in the region.

He has also worked in Asia, a critical part of the job description given the vast array of cultural, economic, social and climactic variations which the Qantas Socceroos now encounter in the largest qualifiying area for the FIFA World Cup. Having someone at the helm who understands the difficulties of travelling and playing through the region certainly helps, as Verbeek demonstrated when he steered the Qantas Socceroos to South Africa with several matches to spare.

"Australia is a very good address from a football point of view."

Osieck has had a busy introduction to the job and has been forced to hit the ground running given that the AFC Asian Cup 2011 in Qatar next January is the first major target on his radar. In mid-August, he watched his new charges go down in a friendly in Slovenia under Han Berger, the FFA's Technical Director, before taking charge for the first time in the two friendlies against Switzerland and Poland early last month.

Osieck showed he had, at the very least, a lucky touch, by directing the team to a goalless draw against the Swiss and a 2-1 win over Poland, where it had to play with 10 men after Brett Emerton's dismissal. It was an impressive beginning.

Ask Osieck why he took on this challenge at this stage of his career and he will unhesitatingly tell you it is because he liked what he saw of the Australian players while he was working with FIFA's TSG.

"I was contacted in South Africa at the World Cup when it was clear that a new coach would be hired by the FFA. We talked and I felt that taking over Australia was definitely a challenge," he says.

"I know what I am talking about, I have travelled the world and have had a number of commitments in different countries, and Australia is a very good address from a football point of view.

"Having followed the national team over the last

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FACT FILE

Holger Osieck

Born
August 31, 1948

Playing career
FC Mulheim (1974–76), Vancouver Whitecaps (1977)

Coaching career
Vancouver Whitecaps (1977), West Germany assistant (1987–90), Olympique Marseille assistant (1990–91), Vfl Bochum (1991–92), Fenerbache (1993–95), Urawa Red Diamonds (1995–96; 2007–08), Kocaelispor (1997–98), Canada (1999–2003), Australia (2010–)

Honours
1990 FIFA World Cup, 2000 CONCACAF Gold Cup, 2007 AFC Champions League

GLORY HUNTER
Osieck has targeted a strong performance at the AFC Asian Cup 2011.

couple of years when I was at international events with FIFA, I always had a very strong impression of the Australians. They are a strong, very competitive team and I think their performances have been outstanding."

Not surprisingly, he is reluctant to read too much into his two matches to date, save to say he was very pleased to have come away unbeaten with such good results against strong European sides.

"It's always a very difficult situation when you start as a coach, as you don't know how players are going to respond and you have to get to know them, not only as players but as people as well. I think that process has started off pretty well. I was very happy with our camp before and during the matches and not just what happened on the field, but off the field as well.

"You have to convey your direction, what you expect and what you want to see, to the players. I think this camp was very promising. We had some acceptable results but on the other hand we definitely know that we are just at the beginning of our cooperation and that there are still a lot of things that have to be worked on."

The general consensus was that while the result against the Poles was better (a win), the draw against the Swiss had been a more impressive performance. Osieck doesn't demur.

"I think I can agree with that. The performance in Switzerland was good despite the fact that we didn't score. We had excellent opportunities and we created a lot of good stuff, whereas in Poland we had to resist against pressure," he says.

"We lost Brett Emerton in the second half and so our game had to become a tactical one. We had to go for a result and we couldn't show too much initiative in the game, at least not as much as I would have liked to have seen. But considering how things went it was a pleasing result and good to see how the team responded. It was a good effort to get that score over the 90 minutes."

There are many who believe Australia's 'Golden Generation' has reached the end of the road and that wholesale changes in the Qantas Socceroos squad and starting line-up will be necessary now that the 2010 FIFA World Cup is gone. There have been calls for Osieck to begin the rebuilding process for the qualifying campaign for Brazil in 2014 now and to use the AFC Asian Cup 2011 as part of a development curve for the younger players. The German, however, doesn't see things quite like that and believes the AFC Asian Cup, as the region's premier international tournament, is worth winning for its own sake. And, he says, he doesn't see the evidence yet that many of the players who have been foundation stones for the Qantas Socceroos over the past few years are necessarily finished.

"As a coach it's definitely important to know about the regional particularities."

"There are two things I would say. I share the point of view that the Asian Cup is a very prestigious tournament. Every country that plays in the tournament will want to do well and, of course, that is our aim too. We want to definitely show a good performance, we want to be very successful. The target is to be in the top ranks," he says.

"But there is also a rebuilding process, which always means a development. It's not done within two or three weeks, it takes time, and in the course of things the players will get the opportunity to show and develop and improve. Therefore to make an abrupt change and say now we forget about what we had and start anew with a radical change, that does not really make sense to me.

"I need time to see the next generation of players, watch them in action, talk to them to make the assessment. I will definitely be talking a lot to the FFA's staff coaches (assistant coach and Qantas Olyroo boss Aurelio Vidmar and junior national teams supremo Jan Versleijen) over the next couple of months.

"But there will also be chats with the club coaches. Communication is a major factor in this area, to get the right players on board to make sure that the international standard of the team is not decreasing but increasing.

"My personal expectation is that to qualify for the tournament is the first step, and then to do well in the tournament is the next. You have to go as far as you can in the tournament, without promising or predicting any stages."

Osieck believes that his experience of coaching at club level in Asia will be key to helping Australia negotiate its way through an increasingly tricky qualifying campaign.

"As a coach it's definitely important to know about the regional particularities. Then you are able to get your team on track in order to play well and successfully. You need to know about circumstances in the countries you are playing, the environment, the conditions you will encounter, the mentality of the referees, the opposition, their character, their style of play. When you have gone through all that before, it can definitely be beneficial."

The coach is no stranger to Australia, having been here a couple of times before, including when he coached Urawa against Sydney FC.

"I will have my main base here definitely. Of course, there will be travel at times, but most of the time I will stay here. I am working together with Aurelio Vidmar. We started off well with the team and I am pretty happy with the cooperation so far, so the question of appointing an assistant coach is not a priority right now," he says.

PROVEN RECORD
Osieck won the AFC Champions League with Urawa in 2007.

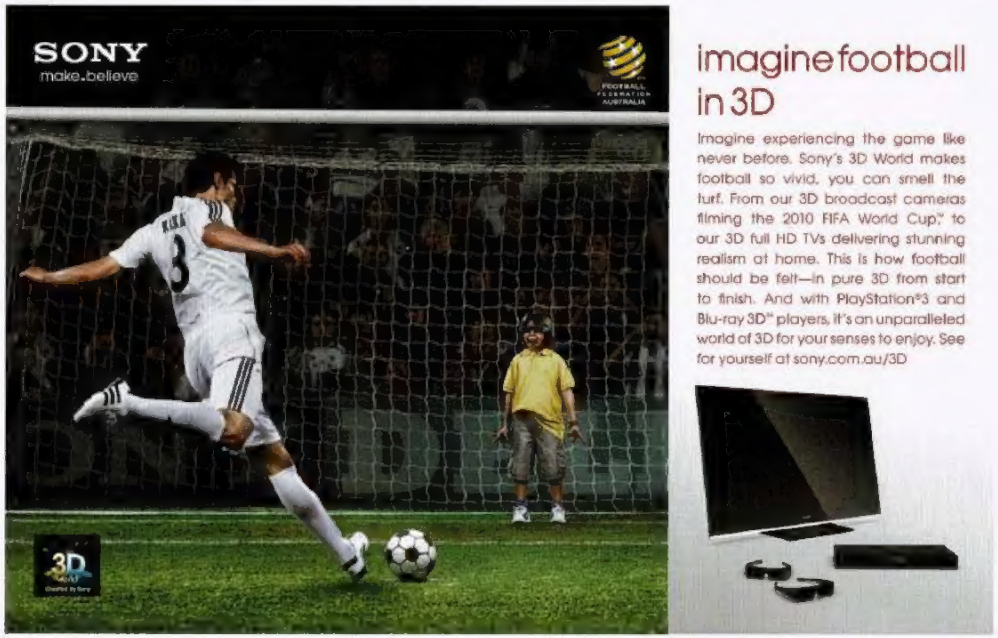
"Last year in December, I was here doing a FIFA course, so I went to watch one game in the Hyundai A-League. My experience is so far limited, but I will be watching as many games as I can during the season. I will view the entire league and travel to games to watch the locally based players.

"I remember very well the games between Urawa and Sydney. It was very close both times. Sydney had a good team. I think we were pretty fortunate to get away with a 2-2 draw here. We were 2-0 down, but we got back and it was good. I was really impressed by Sydney FC then."

Ricki Herbert's New Zealand proved in South Africa that Hyundai A-League players can do a job at the highest level in the FIFA World Cup, so there will be plenty of home-based Australians hoping Osieck will take a similar view when he selects his AFC Asian Cup 2011 squad.

While the likelihood is that overseas stars will dominate, there should be room for a couple of new faces. Osieck is going to have an interesting time over the next few months. And so will the Qantas Socceroos. ●

Michael Lynch is the chief football writer for Melbourne's The Age. *He also contributes to the* Sydney Morning Herald, theage.com.au *and* smh.com.au



HOMECOMING DREAM

There is a growing trend of Australian players waving goodbye to the riches of Europe, and returning home to continue their careers. And that can only be good for the Hyundai A-League. BY AIDAN ORMOND

A glance at Qantas Socceroo squads over the past 30 years provides a telling insight into the nation's shifting football landscape. Up to the 1980s, the majority of Qantas Socceroos played in Australia's domestic national league. By the new millennium, the first-choice national team plied its trade almost exclusively in Europe. Now, that trend is slowly changing back as an increasing number of high-profile stars swap freezing winters for summer football to call the Hyundai A-League home.

"We don't want to lose that intellectual property of players who've been overseas for a long time," says Hyundai A-League boss Lyall Gorman. "We want to capture that to help us grow."

In the Hyundai A-League 2010/11 season alone, Qantas Socceroos Nick Carle, Bruce Djite, Josip Skoko, Michael Beauchamp, Michael Petkovic, Ruben Zadkovich and Kasey Wehrman have returned. And in the previous season, Mile Sterjovski, Shane Stefanutto, Jacob Burns, Jess Vanstrattan, Daniel McBreen, David Williams, Joel Porter and Jason Culina all also inked deals with domestic clubs. That's a whole lot of intellectual property.

Of course, each player has his own reasons for the move, but the sheer number is a big tick for a competition now into its sixth season. "I'd seen the players they'd signed and so I was looking forward to being a part of that," says central defender Beauchamp, who joined ambitious new Hyundai A-League club Melbourne Heart after a spell with Al-Jazira in the UAE.

"I wanted to play regularly. Overseas I'd been in and out through injury and fighting for my position. So I was looking forward to coming home and enjoying football again."

Similarly, Djite returned from two years in the Turkish league where he struggled to find consistency at Genclerbirligi. "If I wasn't worried about the national team at all, I could've stayed overseas and gone off the radar," the striker said after signing for Gold Coast United. "But I want to achieve things in my career."

Sydney FC's attacking midfielder Carle also wants to achieve things in his career. At 28, he sought a side that suited his technical approach after struggling to find his niche in the English Championship. The former Newcastle Jet found it at Sydney FC, which needed a playmaker to replace club legend Steve Corica.

Personal circumstances aside, a major selling point is the increased number of games. The Hyundai A-League now has a 30-round season (nine more than in the first three campaigns), which will expand to 33 rounds with Sydney Rovers' inclusion in a 12-team competition next season.

Add the finals series, AFC Champions League games – something Australia didn't qualify for prior to 2006 when part of the OFC – and pre-season matches such as the Sydney Festival of Football and, for some players, it's around a 40-game season. That's starting to compare with Europe.

Smoothing this player shift has been the 'marquee' transfer concept. Star players at the peak of their careers – like Carle and Culina – can now earn similar incomes to when they were at their overseas clubs. Why? Because these marquee wages are outside the existing Hyundai A-League squad salary cap.

Last season, Culina's move to Gold Coast United was big news. The star midfielder was at the height of his powers in the green and gold and still wanted by his Dutch club PSV Eindhoven, while the 2010 FIFA World Cup was just a year away. His move was a vote of confidence for the Hyundai A-League, although some questioned it at the time. The midfield dynamo subsequently went on to play a key part in the Qantas Socceroos' campaign in South Africa.

An increasingly professional league has also been vital. A by-product of this is the hiring of respected international coaches. Adelaide United's Dutchman Rini Coolen, former Holland and Ajax

NEW CHALLENGE
Michael Beauchamp wanted to be part of Melbourne Heart's inaugural season.

assistant John van't Schip at Heart and North Queensland Fury's Czech mentor Franz Straka all bring a cutting-edge coaching vision to the Australian game.

Carle, too, hails the professionalism of Sydney FC under former Sparta Prague and Czech Republic under-21 national coach Vitezslav Lavicka. "I spent two weeks here at Sydney (to keep fit) last year and really, really enjoyed it under 'Vitya', and that was a big reason why I joined," he says.

However, not all returnees are big names. Scott Jamieson, then unknown, left Bolton Wanderers for Adelaide in 2008 after three years on the fringes of first team action. "What was best for me was to play football again at a decent level," the 21-year-old says.

"You've got to play football to develop on a weekly basis. It's all good and well in the reserves overseas, but there's only so much you can do – especially with first-team players who aren't really interested."

Jamieson increased his profile after playing a key part in the Reds' thrilling 2008 AFC Champions League campaign before switching to Sydney FC earlier this year.

"With first-team football you're playing for points, there's pressure, media – it does toughen you up," adds the wingback, whose regular spot at Hindmarsh Stadium helped him earn a 2009 call-up to the Qantas Socceroos squad.

Like Jamieson, Brisbane Roar's central midfielder Erik Paartalu, 24, wasn't a familiar face but he has since proved himself. With some eye-catching performances under coach Ange Postecoglou, he's back on the national radar after spending much of the past four years out of sight in Scotland. Similarly, Oliver Bozanic's form at Central Coast Mariners has been a highlight after the 21-year-old's brief stint in the UK.

Another feature of the Hyundai A-League is the salary cap. This unique rule helps clubs run on budget, but also restricts the ability of an owner to 'buy success'. It evens out the competition, as Beauchamp sees it. "You know each week it's going to be a good game ... that there are no easy-beats."

The benefits of all these returnees – high profile and young up-and-comers – are many. They bring a suitcase full of experiences, having played in a myriad of other leagues. Their arrival gets fans excited, media interest heightens in Australia and across the world, and the overall standard of the Hyundai A-League improves.

In fact, this season many observers say the standard is at an all-time high. And that's no idle boast – just look at the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Ricki Herbert's All Whites squad was dominated by Hyundai A-League players.

The gallant Kiwis went unbeaten at the tournament – the only nation to do so. Even tonight's visitors Paraguay – which reached the quarter-finals in South Africa – could only muster a 0-0 draw against the Kiwis. Italy and Slovakia also failed to defeat the All Whites, who finished one place above the Italians in Group F.

Not a bad advertisement for the Hyundai A-League, is it?

As for the Qantas Socceroos, the benefits of this repatriation will be seen over the coming months and years. A stronger domestic competition fortifies the talent pool available to new national coach Holger Osieck, particularly given the AFC Asian Cup 2011 will be played in January.

What's more, a more powerful Hyundai A-League increases the chance of success in the AFC Champions League - and the more experience Australian players have in such conditions, the better for the Qantas Socceroos in their contests against the region's best in FIFA World Cup qualification and the AFC Asian Cup.

And with increasing numbers of players based here, tricky international midweek encounters across Asia will become easier with less need to haul players in from Europe straight after weekend games (the difficulties of that were clear to see during the 2010 FIFA World Cup campaign).

"It's a great thing that a national coach looks at the locally based players because it gives them confidence to work hard. And if they're good enough, they'll get a chance to show themselves," says Beauchamp.

But overseas leagues will always attract top Australian talent – it's the same in many developing football cultures. However, Australia now offers a credible alternative. There's still plenty to do, but Gorman is hoping these returning Roos can sprinkle some of their magic across the competition as the nation builds solid foundations for the coming decades. ●

FLAIR FROM AFAR

Who could forget Marcos Flores' stunning goal in Hyundai A-League week four for Adelaide against North Queensland? Or Patricio Perez's eye-catching cameo debut for the Mariners that same round?

As Australia welcomes Paraguay to Sydney tonight, it is just the latest instance of South American stars gracing this country in recent years. South America has enjoyed a love affair with the Hyundai A-League since the competition kicked off in 2005. Flores and Perez are both Argentinians while Melbourne Victory fans still talk wistfully about former playmaker Fred. The pint-sized Brazilian was pivotal in the side's Hyundai A-League 2006/07 premiership campaign. Two even bigger names graced these shores.

Brazilian superstar Romario enjoyed a brief guest spell at Adelaide in 2006, while at Sydney FC countryman Juninho showed glimpses of why he was a 'Selecao' great a few seasons ago.

Of course, not all have worked out. Mario Jardel's spell at Newcastle Jets failed to deliver, but overall the continent has infused the league with a frisson of excitement. And it's not just South America.

The CONCACAF region has also supplied the Hyundai A-League with a host of talent. The finest example is Victory's Costa Rican magician Carlos Hernandez, the current Hyundai A-League player of the year. His goal last season against Gold Coast is rightfully remembered as one of the greatest in the competition's history.

STAR QUALITY
Argentinian Patricio Perez scores against Sydney FC in August.

BLACK ACT
Shane Smeltz and several other Hyundai A-League players shone for New Zealand in South Africa.

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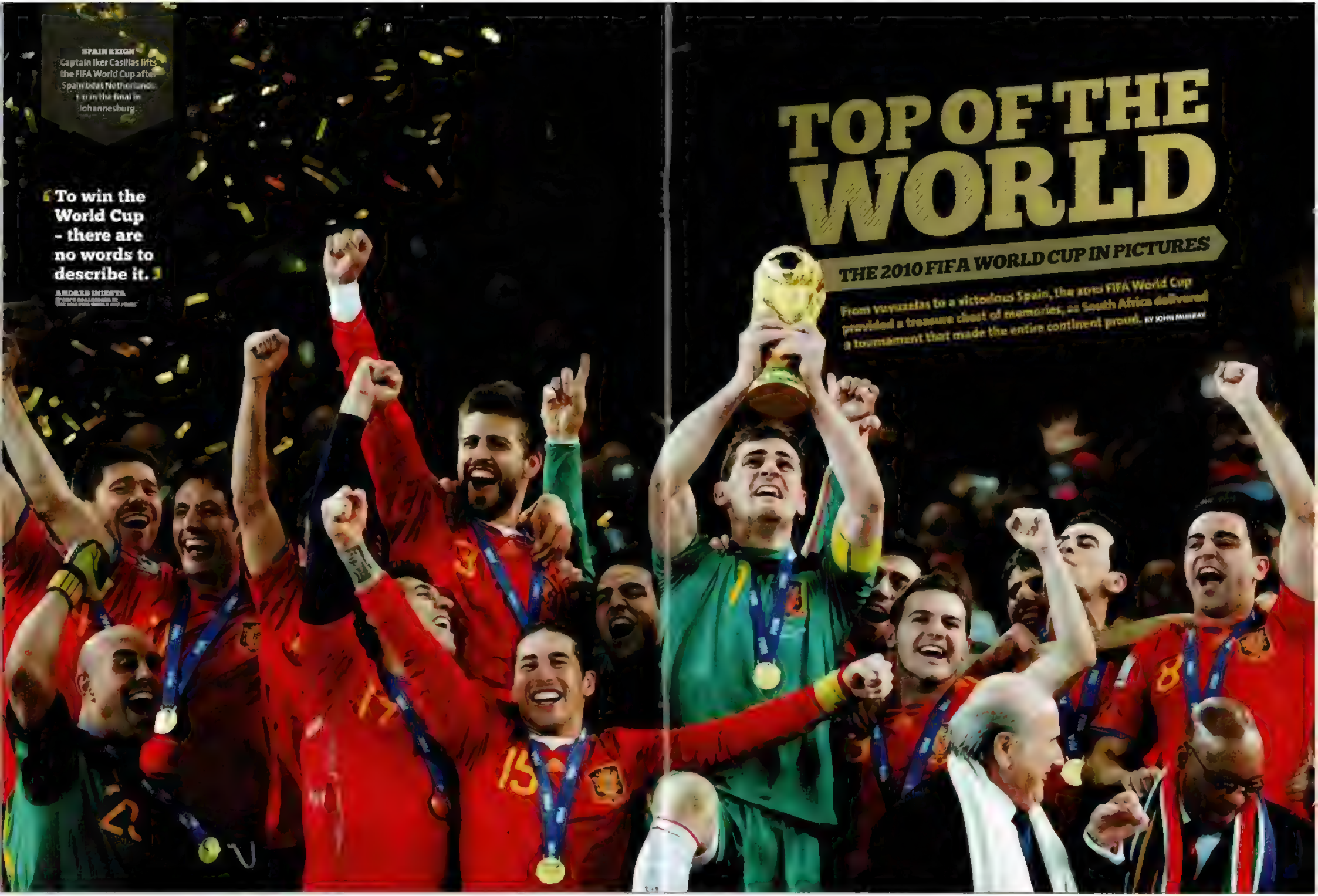

SPAIN REIGN Captain Iker Casillas lifts the FIFA World Cup after Spain beat Netherlands 1-0 in the final in Johannesburg.

"To win the World Cup – there are no words to describe it."

ANDRES INIESTA

TOP OF THE WORLD

THE 2010 FIFA WORLD CUP IN PICTURES

From vuvuzelas to a victorious Spain, the 2010 FIFA World Cup provided a treasure chest of memories, as South Africa delivered a tournament that made the entire continent proud. BY JOHN MURRAY

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GHANA 1
AUSTRALIA 1

1 BALL IN DISPUTE
Jason Culina and Ghana's Kevin Prince Boateng have eyes only for the ball as they contest possession.

2 OFF THE MARK
Brett Holman handed the Qantas Socceroos the perfect start with a goal after 11 minutes.

3 A FIERCE CONTEST
Carl Valeri is taken down in a challenge by Ghana's Anthony Annan, each player's desperation reflective of the commitment shown by both sides.

"The players did a great job and worked hard when everyone thought it was over."
– TIM VERBEEK

AUSTRALIA 2
SERBIA 1

1 SHOWING SUPPORT
The Qantas Socceroos were on their way home, but they signed off in style with three points against Serbia.

2 COMEBACK KING
Tim Cahill returned from suspension to score Australia's first goal against Serbia, his third in FIFA World Cup history.

BEST OF THE REST

1 AFRICA IGNITES
Siphiwe Tshabalala's opening goal of the 2010 FIFA World Cup sparked mass South African celebrations.

2 FLYING DUTCHMAN
Arjen Robben took his game to new heights in the Netherlands' shock quarter-final win over Brazil.

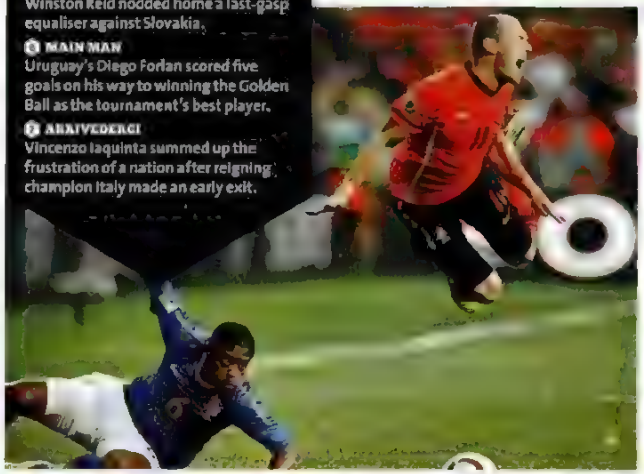
3 NOISE POLLUTION?
Off the field, the main talking point of the tournament was the constant blare of the vuvuzelas.

4 THE ENTERTAINER
Argentina coach Diego Maradona was a constant source of entertainment on the sidelines.

5 SURPRISE PACKET
New Zealand drew all three games in the group stage, including when Winston Reid nodded home a last-gasp equaliser against Slovakia.

6 MAIN MAN
Uruguay's Diego Forlan scored five goals on his way to winning the Golden Ball as the tournament's best player.

7 ARRIVEDERCI
Vincenzo Iaquinta summed up the frustration of a nation after reigning champion Italy made an early exit.



BEST OF THE REST

1 FEELING BLUE
With poor results and player revolts, France endured a terrible time in South Africa, earning just one point.

2 BUTTER FINGERS
Rob Green's howler against the USA was one of many disappointments for England during the tournament.

3 HANDS OFF
Luis Suarez felt the wrath of Africa after his handball helped deny Ghana a place in the semi-finals.

4 FINAL FLOURISH
Andres Iniesta was the toast of Spain after driving home the only goal of the 2010 FIFA World Cup final.

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Qantas Socceroos v Paraguay

Continental Rift

Igor Osieck faces a major challenge tonight in his first home match as one of the 2010 FIFA World Cup quarter-finalists. BY LOUIS MURRAY

As Australian football has grown in stature over the last decade, South America has been a constant companion on the journey.

It is impossible to talk about the Qantas Socceroos without mentioning Uruguay. First there was the low point, the heart-wrenching disappointment of the 2001 defeat in Montevideo which signalled the end of another FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign. Then came Sydney and the ecstasy of John Aloisi's penalty four years later. A drought of 32 years had come to an end, and Australia, not Uruguay, would be going to the 2006 FIFA World Cup.

There were many highlights from that tournament in Germany, but the group match against Brazil was confirmation that Australia truly was up against the big boys now. The Qantas Socceroos might have lost 2-0, but they made the Samba boys scrap for every second of the 90 minutes, and gave them a few scares along the way

One year later, thousands of fans – having spent countless early morning TV sessions gasping at his skills in the UEFA Champions League – flocked to the MCG to watch Lionel Messi in the flesh for Argentina

Tonight's opponent Paraguay has played its part too. Namely, the part of spoilsports it was an occasion more memorable for the retirements of certain individuals than the opposition, but the Paraguayans didn't read the script in a friendly international at Brisbane's Suncorp Stadium. Three months on from the 2006 FIFA World Cup, Australia said goodbye, and thank you, to four Qantas Socceroo stalwarts – Tony Popovic, Stan Lazaridis, Tony Vidmar and Zeljko Kalac

A fairytale finish was on the cards when Popovic headed home Marc Bresciano's free kick with three minutes left on the clock. However, with seconds remaining, a hopeful cross into the Australian area was headed into his own net by Michael Beauchamp.

It was at the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa that Paraguay recorded its best result.

That unfortunate own goal earned the visitors a 1-1 draw, and was just another example of the twists and turns the Qantas Socceroos have experienced at the hands of South American opposition.

So, what can we expect from tonight's visitors? Since appearing in the inaugural FIFA World Cup in 1930, Paraguay has been a constant presence on the global stage, without ever hitting the heights of its more illustrious neighbours. In all, the Albirroja have qualified for football's biggest tournament eight times, but it is in their own continent where they have enjoyed their only significant success – winning the Copa America in 1953 and 1979.

The Paraguayans have been a familiar presence at the FIFA World Cup in the modern era, with successive appearances in the past four competitions. In 1998 and 2002, the 'Golden Generation' led the team into the knockout stages, only to suffer narrow losses to France and Germany respectively. The team's foundations were built on its defence, with Carlos Gamarra and Celso Ayala marshalling the backline in front of irrepressible goalkeeper Jose Luis Chilavert. All three were chosen in the all-star team of the tournament in 1998.

Yet it was at the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa that Paraguay recorded its best result. Yes, Uruguay deservedly hogged the South American limelight, with the two-time former winner advancing to the semi-finals and accounting for the host nation, France and home favourite Ghana along the way, as Argentina and Brazil fell apart at the first serious challenge they encountered

Chile also won fans for its attacking, free-flowing play, but for Paraguay, the South African adventure marked the first time the nation had backed up an excellent qualifying campaign with a strong performance at the tournament proper.

SECOND CHANCE
Scott McDonald is back in favour with new coach Holger Osieck.

Pooled with Italy, Slovakia and New Zealand, Paraguay confounded expectations to top the group. First up was an encouraging 1-1 draw with reigning champion Italy, followed by a convincing 2-0 defeat of Slovakia. A goalless draw against the plucky, but extremely unadventurous All Whites in the final match guaranteed top spot. (Paraguay will play New Zealand in a friendly on October 12.)

The reward was a clash with Japan, and the chance to advance past the last 16 for the first time. Gerardo Martino's men had the better of a drab contest but failed to make their superiority pay, with the teams level at 0-0 after 120 minutes. In the penalty shootout, the Paraguayans were deadly from 12 yards and, after Yuichi Komano blazed over, Oscar Cardozo had the opportunity to be the hero. His audacious chip into the middle of the goal has become a treasured moment in Paraguayan football.

One of four South American nations to reach the quarter finals, Paraguay pushed eventual champion Spain arguably harder than any other side in the elimination phase. Switzerland might have defeated Villa, Xavi, Casillas and co. in the group stage, but the Paraguayans came close to delivering the knockout blow.

In a tight contest, Nelson Valdez had reason to feel aggrieved when a perfectly good goal was incorrectly ruled out for offside. The Paraguayans had the chance to make amends after 57 minutes from the penalty spot, but Cardozo – coolness personified in the previous round – failed to beat Casillas. Extra time loomed after goalkeeper Justo Villar then saved Xabi Alonso's spot kick but, with eight minutes remaining, Villa broke Paraguayan hearts when he rolled home the game's only goal.

It was a cruel end but, on reflection, Paraguay could be proud of its efforts. Upon arriving home, the players were welcomed by more than 3000 fans, and later the president. A deserved reception for a team that had reached the same stage as continental giants Brazil and Argentina and, with a bit of luck, could have gone even further.

The attacking triumvirate of Cardozo, Valdez and Manchester City frontman Roque Santa Cruz caused headaches for some of the world's best defenders, but it was the Paraguayan backline – following in the tradition of 1998 – that was particularly impressive, conceding just twice in five games.

The Qantas Socceroos will need to be at their sharpest to find a way past Villar tonight.

Facing such a miserly defence, the Qantas Socceroos will need to be at their sharpest to find a way past Villar tonight. Judging from previous encounters, there will be little separating the teams. Australia has never lost to Paraguay, winning one and drawing the other three of their four matches (Paraguay played a three-match series against the Qantas Socceroos in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne in 2000, with the home side taking the honours in Victoria's capital thanks to goals from Craig Foster and David Zdrilic).

Holger Osieck has made an encouraging start to his time as coach, with a draw against Switzerland and a win over Poland at their respective home grounds.

Now in his first match on home soil, his task gets trickier as he aims to deliver a strong performance in front of the Australian fans, while at the same time trying out new faces as he builds for the AFC Asian Cup 2011.

There is already change in the air. Matthew Spiranovic, James Holland, Nathan Burns, Jon McKain, Bruce Djite, Tommy Oar and Scott McDonald – none of whom were part of the final 2010 FIFA World Cup squad – have all featured in friendlies since South Africa, and will be pushing their claims for a place on the plane to Qatar in January. It is hoped Oar, Holland and Burns will spearhead a new generation of Qantas Socceroos.

At the other end of the spectrum, McKain, 28, made his first appearance in the green and gold for four years, while 27-year-old McDonald is still to break his international scoring duck, but Osieck seems determined to give him time and has been working on a partnership up front with Tim Cahill.

Perhaps that duo will flourish at the Sydney Football Stadium where Australia has enjoyed some positive results in recent years. In their last outing in the Harbour City, the Qantas Socceroos held the Netherlands to a goalless draw – a result that looks even better now given how well the Dutch fared in South Africa.

Bahrain and Uzbekistan were also brushed aside last year, and Australia hasn't lost at this stadium since a 1-0 loss to China in 2008 when it had already secured top spot in its 2010 FIFA World Cup qualification group.

Sydney, of course, was the scene of Australia's historic win over Uruguay in 2005. There is a different South American side in town tonight, and much less at stake, but if the teams can produce half the drama of five years ago, then the supporters are in for a treat ●

SPOT ON
Euphoria erupts after Paraguay's penalty win over Japan in South Africa.

AERIAL THREAT
Giant striker Oscar Cardozo will be a threat at set pieces tonight.

Goalkeeper, goalscorer, true great

Think of Paraguayan football, and one name always springs to mind: Jose Luis Chilavert. Goalkeeper extraordinaire. National captain. Free-kick specialist. Penalty taker. And, lest anyone ever forget, an eccentric, larger-than-life character.

For more than two decades, Chilavert was the face of football in Paraguay, constantly making headlines – good and bad.

At club level, he played for many different South American clubs, as well as several European clubs. At international level, he made his debut at 24, winning 74 caps until his retirement in 2003.

Chilavert was named world goalkeeper of the year three times, and shone on the global stage at the 1998 and 2002 FIFA World Cups.

Yet as good as he was with the gloves, it was what he did at the other end of the field that thrilled the fans. Chilavert was a goalscorer. He scored an unbelievable 62 goals in his career, most of them penalties and free kicks, including eight for the national side – four of them coming in the 2002 FIFA World Cup qualifiers.

Never one to keep his opinions to himself, the shaven-headed Chilavert often made bold statements and predictions about games. He also was caught up in his fair share of controversies, including one notable scuffle with Colombian Faustino Asprilla, and received a six-month suspended jail sentence in France in 2005.

A fiery character, he often fell foul of referees – Chilavert was sent off when Australia played Paraguay at Melbourne's Olympic Park in 2000.

Put it all together, and you had one of football's most compelling characters, and one who was adored by the Paraguayan public.

NATIONAL HERO
Jose Luis Chilavert, Paraguayan football's most famous export.

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QANTAS SOCCEROOS

AUSTRALIA

Write the players numbers in the spaces provided below when tonight's teams are announced

GOALKEEPERS

- Eugene Galekovic
- Mark Schwarzer

DEFENDERS

- David Carney
- Jon McKain
- Jade North
- Michael Thwaite
- Luke Wilkshire

MIDFIELDERS

- Tim Cahill
- Jason Culina
- Richard Garcia
- Mile Jedinak
- Matthew McKay
- Carl Valeri
- Dario Vidosic

STRIKERS

- Alex Brosque
- Josh Kennedy
- Harry Kewell
- Scott McDonald

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PARAGUAY

Paraguay squad as provided by the Paraguay Football Association

GOALKEEPERS

- Justo Villar
- Diego Barreto

DEFENDERS

- Paulo da Silva
- Carlos Bonet
- Claudio Morel Rodriguez
- Dario Veron
- Antolin Alcaraz
- Cesar Benitez

MIDFIELDERS

- Enrique Vera
- Cristian Riveros
- Osvaldo Martinez
- Osmar Molinas
- Celso Ortiz
- Nestor Camacho
- Hernan Perez
- Derlis Orue

STRIKERS

- Roque Santa Cruz
- Nelson Valdez
- Edgar Benitez

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MEET THE QANTAS SOCCEROOS

New coach Holger Osieck has shown faith in the Hyundai A-League, with six of tonight's squad of 18 based in the domestic competition. BY JOHN MURRAY

NEW ERA
The Qantas Socceroos play their first home game after the FIFA World Cup.

Sometimes smaller can be better When Pim Verbeek selected his squad for May's friendly against New Zealand, he picked 31 players. Eight of those then stepped aside when a final 23-man squad was confirmed for the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa

For tonight's match against Paraguay, Holger Osieck chose just 18 players, perhaps keen to work more closely with a smaller group as he seeks to learn as much as possible, as quickly as possible, about his new team.

When he became Qantas Socceroos coach in August, the German declared he would give opportunities to players from the Hyundai A-League, and he has stayed true to his word. Osieck picked six players from the domestic competition – Eugene Galekovic, Jade North, Michael Thwaite, Jason Culina, Matthew McKay and Alex Brosque – making up almost a third of the squad.

They are joined by 12 overseas-based players, with Josh Kennedy and Harry Kewell featuring for the first time since South Africa after recovering from injury Of the 12, five play in the English leagues, two in Turkey, and one in each of Russia, Germany, Italy, Japan and Saudi Arabia.

Brett Holman, who was so impressive in the 2010 FIFA World Cup and against Poland last month, and talented defender Matthew Spiranovic were both excluded from the squad due to injury.

In naming the squad, Osieck said there was a mix of big-name and locally based players

"I think I put a good mix of players together – experienced players from outside, in particular the big names that people here in Australia would like to see, and a couple of local players from the A-League," he said.

THE SQUAD

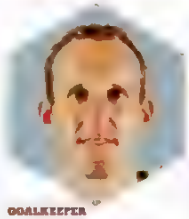
Australia's 18-man squad is made up of two goalkeepers, five defenders, seven midfielders and four strikers.

GOALKEEPER

Eugene Galekovic

AGE 29
CLUB ADELAIDE UNITED (AUS)
CAPS 4

Originally named as a standby for the Qantas Socceroos squad at the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Galekovic flew to South Africa when Bradley Jones had to return home. He has gone from strength to strength since joining Adelaide United in 2007 and was named the Hyundai A-League Goalkeeper of the Year in the past two seasons. He has also shown excellent form in the AFC Champions League.

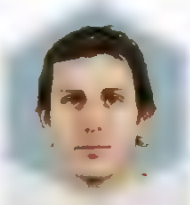


GOALKEEPER

Mark Schwarzer

AGE 38
CLUB FULHAM (ENG)
CAPS 80

Schwarzer turned 38 three days ago, but he is showing no signs of declining with age. The most-capped Australian goalkeeper in history, he played every minute of the Qantas Socceroos' 2010 FIFA World Cup campaign. The veteran stopper was in inspired form against Switzerland last month, pulling off several top saves to keep a clean sheet. Schwarzer seemed set to move across London to Arsenal in August, but a deal could not be reached with Fulham.



DEFENDER

Jon McKain

AGE 28
CLUB AL NASSR (SA)
CAPS 12

Holger Osieck handed McKain his first international cap in four years when he played in last month's friendly against Poland. The occasion threatened to turn sour for the central defender when he conceded a penalty, but Adam Federici spared his blushes by keeping out the resulting kick. McKain was a pivotal player for Wellington Phoenix in its Hyundai A-League 2009-10 finals campaign, but moved to Saudi Arabia in June when he joined Al-Nassr.

DEFENDER

David Carney

AGE 26
CLUB BLACKPOOL (ENG)
CAPS 30

Carney is emerging as a key figure for the Qantas Socceroos after several years as a fringe player. The skilful wing-back, who is happy on the left-side of defence or midfield, broke into Australia's first-team in South Africa to play against Ghana and Serbia. Carney returned to England in September when he joined Premiership new boys Blackpool. He previously played for Everton, Norwich and Sheffield United, and won the Dutch Eredivisie title with FC Twente last season.

MIDFIELDER

Richard Garcia

AGE 29
CLUB HULL (ENG)
CAPS 12

Garcia has returned to favour in the green and gold in 2010. After featuring in the warm-up games to the 2010 FIFA World Cup, he led the line against Germany, becoming the first Hull player to appear in the tournament. Against Poland last month, he won the penalty that resulted in the winning goal. The attacking midfielder has spent most of his career in England since joining the West Ham youth academy.

MIDFIELDER

Mile Jedinak

AGE 26
CLUB GENCLERBIRLIGI (TUR)
CAPS 14

Jedinak has been a regular in the national squad since his debut in 2008, and provides excellent cover in the middle. He made one appearance for Australia in the 2010 FIFA World Cup, against Germany, and played against both Switzerland and Poland last month. Currently plays for Genclerbirligi in Turkey after moving from Central Coast Mariners in 2009. Should add to his caps tally over the next 12 months.

MIDFIELDER

Matthew McKay

AGE 27
CLUB BRISBANE ROAR (AUS)
CAPS 4

McKay is one of several Hyundai A-League players hoping to be on the plane to Qatar for the AFC Asian Cup 2011, and may get his chance to impress the new coach tonight. The Brisbane Roar midfielder played in the final two qualifiers for Qatar, against Kuwait and Indonesia. Fit and athletic, McKay uses his speed and endurance to get into good attacking positions from midfield

MIDFIELDER

Carl Valeri

AGE 25
CLUB SASSUOLO (ITA)
CAPS 18

Three years after making his Qantas Socceroos debut against China, Valeri is now firmly entrenched in the Australian line-up following some strong performances in 2010. In contention for a starting berth in South Africa, but no certainty, he played all three games – something he labelled his greatest achievement to date. Nicknamed 'Mini Vinnie' for his likeness to Vincenzo Grella, Valeri is a no-nonsense defensive midfielder.

MIDFIELDER

Dario Vidosic

AGE 23
CLUB FC NURNBERG (GER)
CAPS 10

One of several youngsters who represent the future for Australian football, Vidosic is a versatile, attacking midfielder who can also play up front. He proved his striker's instincts in a sublime display against New Zealand in May when he scored the equaliser. That performance helped book his ticket to South Africa, although he didn't play. A substitute against Switzerland and Slovenia, he should feature tonight.

DEFENDER

Jade North

AGE 28
CLUB WELLINGTON PHOENIX (NZ)
CAPS 29

North was one of the unlucky men who got cut from the Qantas Socceroos' preliminary squad before the 2010 FIFA World Cup, but has since returned to the international scene. The defender, who can play at full-back or in the middle of defence, played 90 minutes in the friendly against Slovenia in August. He starred for Newcastle Jets from 2005-09, and returned to the Hyundai A-League with Wellington Phoenix this year.

DEFENDER

Michael Thwaite

AGE 27
CLUB GOLD COAST UNITED (AUS)
CAPS 6

Following a sterling start to the season with Gold Coast United, Thwaite was rewarded with a return to the Qantas Socceroos squad. The defender spent several seasons in eastern Europe before returning home to Melbourne Victory and then moving north in 2009. He made his international debut in 2005 and was part of the squad that eliminated Uruguay in the historic 2006 FIFA World Cup play-off.

DEFENDER

Luke Wilkshire

AGE 29
CLUB [illegible] MOSCOW (RUS)
CAPS [illegible]

A surprise inclusion in Guus Hiddink's 2006 FIFA World Cup squad, Wilkshire is now one of the first players selected and on the verge of 50 caps. The utility, who can do a job in defence or midfield, played every game in South Africa. He has proved his attacking nature in the past 12 months, scoring against Oman and Kuwait in the AFC Asian Cup qualifiers, and from the spot against Poland in September.

MIDFIELDER

Tim Cahill

AGE 30
CLUB EVERTON (ENG)
CAPS 44

It's difficult to overestimate Cahill's worth to the Qantas Socceroos. The most prolific goalscorer in the squad, he averages almost a goal every second game for his country, and is also the leading scorer at the FIFA World Cup, having netted for a third time against Serbia in June. Cahill endured a mixed campaign in South Africa, though, after being sent off against Germany and suspended for the Ghana clash.

MIDFIELDER

Jason Culina

AGE 30
CLUB GOLD COAST UNITED (AUS)
CAPS 54

When Culina returned home to play for Gold Coast United last year, there were some fears the move would affect his role with the national team. He has emphatically dismissed those concerns, playing every game in the 2010 FIFA World Cup, just as he did four years earlier. A midfielder always looking to push forward, he led Gold Coast to the Hyundai A-League 2010 Finals Series in its first season

STRIKER

Alex Brosque

AGE 26
CLUB SYDNEY FC (AUS)
CAPS 4

Considered one of Australia's brightest prospects when playing for Marconi in the NSL, Brosque has thrived for Sydney FC in the Hyundai A-League, playing a key role in its 2009-10 premiership campaign. That form resulted in a return to the Australia squad in 2009 for the first time in three years. A prolific forward, Brosque – who turns 27 in three days – made his Qantas Socceroos debut in 2004.

STRIKER

Josh Kennedy

AGE 28
CLUB NAGOYA GRAMPUS (JAP)
CAPS 21

After rising to prominence at the 2006 FIFA World Cup, Kennedy has since been a regular face in Qantas Socceroos squads. He played twice in South Africa and scored the only goal against Denmark in a pre-tournament friendly. That strike was notable in that it was exactly that, a strike – all his other goals for Australia have been headers. The giant forward averages a goal every three games for his country.

STRIKER

Harry Kewell

AGE 32
CLUB GALATASARAY (TUR)
CAPS 46

From the highs of the 2006 FIFA World Cup where his goal against Croatia took Australia into the last 16, Kewell experienced the lows of football in South Africa, where his tournament lasted 24 minutes. After missing the Germany game with injury, he was sent off against Ghana for a handball. Now 32, the star attacker still has plenty to offer his country and has impressed for Galatasaray this season.

STRIKER

Scott McDonald

AGE 27
CLUB MIDDLESBROUGH (ENG)
CAPS 18

After his highly successful three-year stint at Celtic ended at the start of 2010, McDonald has adapted well to life in the English Championship with Middlesbrough, doing what he does best – scoring goals. He is still to get off the mark for the Qantas Socceroos. But with Holger Osieck showing faith in the him – he started against Switzerland and Poland – that statistic will surely end soon.

COACH

Holger Osieck

AGE 62
POSITION HEAD COACH

Osieck leads Australia for the first time at home after a strong start as coach. He has coached in countries such as Turkey, Japan and Germany, was assistant to Franz Beckenbauer for West Germany's 1990 FIFA World Cup win, and Canada's coach from 1999-2003.

WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE Tim Cahill, Mark Schwarzer and Lucas Neill (L-R) are among the most decorated Qantas Socceroos.

FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA STAFF

Phillip Wolanski	Head of Delegation	Kurt Lisle	Physiotherapist
Holger Osieck	Head Coach	Luke Attwell	Masseur
Gary Moretti	Team Manager	Dom Rabsch	Equipment Manager
Aurelio Vidmar	Coach	Adam Mark	Media Manager
Tony Franken	Goalkeeping Coach	Lindsay McNeill	Media, TV Unit
Dr Mark Jones	Doctor	Joel Freeme	Administration
Les Gelis	Senior Physiotherapist	Mark Saliba	Security

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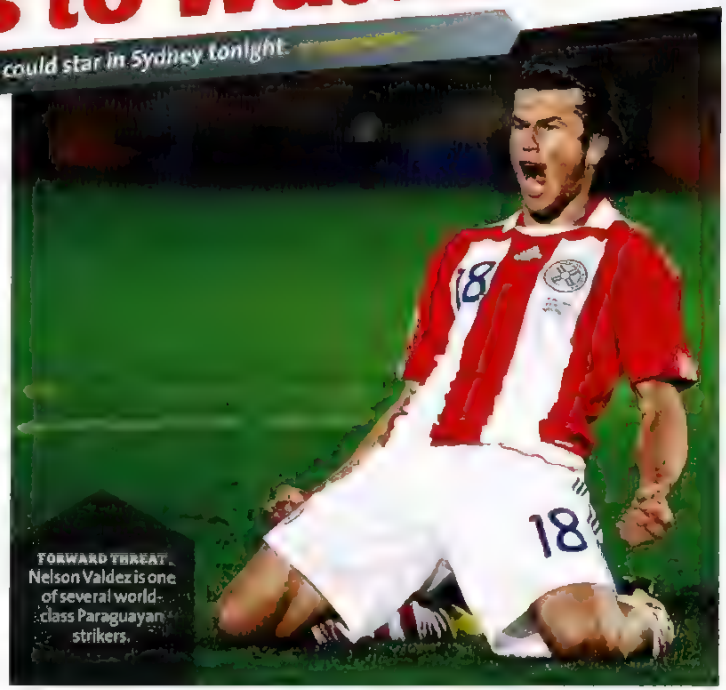
Ones to Watch

Meet four players who could star in Sydney tonight



FORWARD THREAT Nelson Valdez is one of several world-class Paraguayan strikers.

ROQUE SANTA CRUZ

The star name of Paraguayan football, Santa Cruz made his debut for the national team at just 17 and is a veteran of three FIFA World Cup campaigns. An imposing presence up front, the target man averages almost a goal every three games for Paraguay. Now 29, he has played for several big clubs across Europe, including Bayern Munich where he won the UEFA Champions League in 2001. After flourishing for Blackburn in the English Premier League, Santa Cruz earned a move to Manchester City in 2009. However, he has been plagued by injuries, which also affected his form for the national team.

NELSON VALDEZ

The third musketeer in Paraguay's striking triumvirate, Valdez was the most impressive of his country's forwards in South Africa. Although he didn't find the net, he was a key figure and – as any Paraguayan will tell you – had a goal incorrectly ruled out for offside against Spain in the quarter final. Instantly recognisable with his flowing locks and headband, Valdez has a knack for scoring important goals for his country, such as the winner against Argentina that sealed Paraguay's progress to the 2010 FIFA World Cup. After impressing in the Bundesliga for Werder Bremen and Borussia Dortmund, he joined Hercules in the Spanish Primera Liga in August.

SAFE HANDS Justo Villar, left, conceded just two goals at the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

JUSTO VILLAR

After many years as standby to legendary goalkeeper Jose Luis Chilavert, Villar is now firmly established as Paraguay's No. 1 and captained his country in South Africa. He is a hard man to beat. The keeper conceded just two goals, against heavyweights Italy and Spain, in five games at the 2010 FIFA World Cup. He was less fortunate at the 2006 FIFA World Cup – a torn thigh muscle just eight minutes into the first game against England ended his tournament. Named the Paraguayan Footballer of the Year in 2004, Villar plays for Spanish side Real Valladolid.

PAULO DA SILVA

One of the most experienced members of the Paraguayan squad, da Silva is a pivotal player in a defence that prides itself on being miserly. The hard-working, no-nonsense defender negated some of the world's best strikers in South Africa and will prove a handful for the Qantas Socceroos' forwards in Sydney tonight. Da Silva, 33, made his international debut 10 years ago and has played for many clubs on several continents, including four different Italian sides. After a hugely successful six years in Mexico, he got his first taste of the English Premier League with Sunderland in 2009.

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POSITIVE SIGNS Lucas Neill is encouraged by the Qantas Socceroos' form in recent friendlies.

Q&A

QATAR QUEST

While disappointed to miss tonight's game, Qantas Socceroos captain Lucas Neill recently told ASHLEY BROWNE he is buoyed by his side's progress since the 2010 FIFA World Cup, and ready to lead Australia to success at this January's AFC Asian Cup in Qatar.

It's been three months since the 2010 FIFA World Cup. With a bit of time to reflect, what are your thoughts on how the Socceroos fared?

I've still got mixed emotions. On the one hand it was a campaign we could feel proud of, but also in hindsight one that could have seen us progress to the latter stages of the tournament. You can only play each game as it comes and while we let ourselves down in the first game, we made up for it in the next two.

Did you watch much of the rest of the tournament, or choose not to pay much attention once you were out of it?

I took notice of how Ghana went because of the 'what-if' scenario, to see how we might have gone had we progressed. After we were out of Germany in 2006, I paid no attention to the rest of the World Cup whatsoever, but this time I took a bit more interest and watched a few more games. I watched the Spain-Holland final because I knew some of the guys who were playing, but I was in America, so there weren't too many places where I could watch it.

The Qantas Socceroos have played three matches since and the two most recent, against Switzerland and Poland, looked promising. How do you assess them?

It was important to play against these really competitive teams and to try and grasp what the new manager wants. We showed some glimpses, particularly in the first half against Switzerland. We're still lacking a bit of belief and we're a little bit rusty because of the changeover, but the signs are very good. The most important thing is we showed some form in those games and it's very exciting to be coming into camp for this week's game against Paraguay. We hope to put in a very good week and to play well against a strong South American team.

With a new coach such as Holger Osieck, how many sessions and how many games does it take to get used to new gameplans, new systems and new formations?

You want to get the most out of every session because our time with him is limited. Hopefully by January he will have had enough time to put his style across and by then I think we will have learned what is expected of us as players. But they're not huge changes and it's not like everyone has to learn to play football again. It's more knowing when to go left and when to go right, when to go forward and when to go back. There are subtle differences that the whole team has to understand. I think it's coming, but it's probably only 75 per cent there.

So tell us a bit about the new coach.
He's just a really straightforward and honest guy, but extremely educated in football. He likes to allow you to work things out for yourself and learn from your mistakes.

We tend to focus on the FIFA World Cup but the AFC Asian Cup four years ago was really disappointing. Does that still cut deep among the guys?
It was a very disappointing campaign, but when you look at it, as bad as we were, we lost in the quarter-finals to Japan in a penalty shoot-out. It shows that if we get everything right, both physically and mentally, when we go into the tournament and we are playing an attractive brand of football we can go through to the very late stages of the tournament. We're a proud nation, we want to be playing in the big games and trying to win a very important trophy. There's no better chance than in January. It's a great challenge but everyone is very determined to do better than last time.

We want to be playing in big games and trying to win a very important trophy.

What do you expect from Paraguay?
They'll be very strong, very organised and have plenty of flair, which is what they showed during the World Cup. They had a very good and proud tournament and hopefully they can bring a similarly strong squad to Australia, so they can give us a really strong test and help stage a really entertaining contest for the Australian supporters.

Wasn't your first game as captain against Paraguay?
Yep, in Brisbane and we played really well until we conceded a late goal and drew 1-1.

How hard is it to travel across the world to play one game of football?
It's not hard when you're coming back to Australia.

MIXED EMOTIONS While proud of his side's 2010 FIFA World Cup campaign, Neill was disappointed not to progress further.

We're all experienced now when it comes to long-haul travel, how to prepare ourselves and get over the jet lag. But it's always a great opportunity to see family and friends and to remind ourselves of how lucky we are to have come from such a beautiful country.

So what's it like the other way, when you play midweek in Australia and are then back playing in Europe by the weekend?
That's when it gets difficult. You'll have just played a game and you're really fatigued and then you go on this long flight, so you don't get to recover as you'd really like to. You stiffen up, you haven't eaten or slept properly and then go and play an elite-level game 24 or 48 hours later. It's tough, it takes a bit out of you and you spend the next few days trying to recover. But you don't want to let your club or country down.

How much time do you get to think about the Qantas Socceroos when you're back in Turkey totally immersed in your commitments with Galatasaray?
There's probably three or four days a month where I'm thinking about Australia and the Socceroos and the other days I'm thinking about my club. But I'm in regular touch with a lot of the guys, seeing who's playing well and who's fit. I chat occasionally with the

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OLD HANDS
Neill and Tim Cahill, left, remain committed to the Qantas Socceroos

medical guys and the manager and I'm always looking forward to and counting down the days to the next international game. But then every day at the club I have Harry (Kewell) and we're always talking about the last game, the next game, what we could to improve things and our excitement about the next game and the upcoming tournaments.

Harry must be very keen to play well against Paraguay.
It's the same for everybody. It's our first game at home since the World Cup and an opportunity to show the manager how keen we are to be in the squad for the Asian Cup. It's not just Harry, but everyone. Harry is in good form at the moment – he's raring to go.

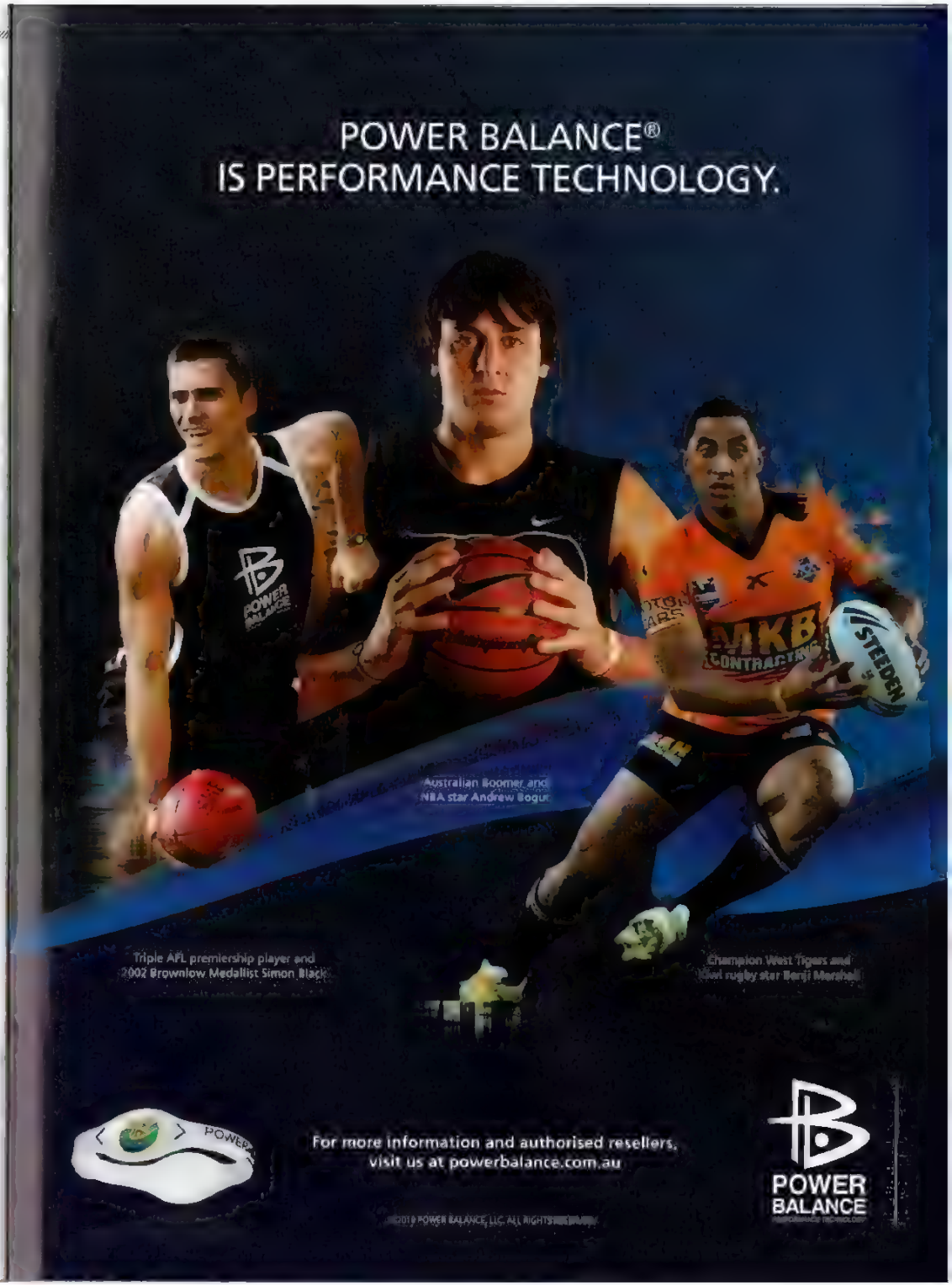
As captain, what's your approach with a guy like Scott McDonald, clearly a gifted player but one who still hasn't scored for Australia?
You just have to tell him, even though he doesn't really need to be told, that everyone believes in him and he needs to keep believing in himself. All strikers go through lean spells – perhaps not as dry as this – but when he does score, he'll probably get a bagful. If he keeps getting into a position to miss them then that's a good thing, and it might take an unusual deflection or a slice of luck to get the breakthrough he needs. He's very talented and the goals will come.

Six Hyundai A-League guys are in the current squad. You must be pleased there is room for the local league players.
It's a great compliment for the league and for how strong it is becoming. Hopefully there will be more down the track and it provides inspiration for the A-League guys, knowing there is something to aim for apart from week-to-week club football.

How has your club form been?
I was not happy at the start because it was a strange pre-season when I couldn't get into any sort of rhythm. But we've won the last four and we're playing well defensively and keeping a few clean sheets. Hopefully I can take that form into this game because I'm feeling really fresh and really fit.

FACT FILE
LUCAS NEILL

BORN	March 9, 1978
HEIGHT	183cm
WEIGHT	78kg
CLUB	Galatasaray
PREVIOUS CLUBS	Millwall, Blackburn Rovers, West Ham United, Everton
A-INTERNATIONAL GAMES	62
A-INTERNATIONAL GOALS	0



Countdown to QATAR

An in-depth preview of the AFC Asian Cup 2011 to be held in Qatar in January.

BY JOHN MURRAY

THUMB TEXT
Park Ji-Sung's Korea Republic is a danger side in Australia's Group C.

If confirmation was needed of the challenges the Qantas Socceroos would face playing in Asia, the AFC Asian Cup 2007 provided it. One year on from its exploits at the 2006 FIFA World Cup, Australia was a warm favourite to take out the tournament. Under Guus Hiddink's guidance in Germany, Australia had been the best performing nation of the Asian Football Confederation it had only recently joined. In 2007, there was a new coach at the helm, Graham Arnold, but almost all the same personnel who had come so close to upsetting eventual world champion Italy in Kaiserslautern

The first indication the AFC Asian Cup 2007 wouldn't be the stroll some experts were predicting came in Australia's opening game with Oman. The Omanis took an early lead before Tim Cahill salvaged a point with an equaliser two minutes into injury time.

Things got worse in the next match when Iran humbled the Qantas Socceroos 3-1.

With qualification hanging in the balance, Australia thrashed Thailand 4-0 at the National Stadium in Bangkok. That result ensured Arnold's men finished second in their group, setting up a quarter-final clash with Far East powerhouse Japan. A penalty shootout was required with the teams locked at 1-1 after 120 minutes, and when Australia missed twice from 12 yards, the Asian Cup dream was over

Plenty has happened to the Australian team since that night in Hanoi. Another FIFA World Cup campaign has come and gone, with the Qantas Socceroos now a regular presence at the tournament. Pim Verbeek took over from Arnold, and has since been replaced by Holger Osieck. Mark Viduka, Scott Chipperfield and Craig Moore have retired from the Qantas Socceroos, with a fresh group fighting to take their spots.

The likes of Neill, Cahill, Kewell and Schwarzer remain, however. And in Qatar next January, they will have another chance to become champions of the continent.

The AFC Asian Cup 2011 will be the 15th time the tournament has been held since it was first played in Hong Kong in 1956. Qatar will stage the tournament for the second time. Host nations have triumphed six times, with Japan the recent in 1992

Australia will need its full squad if it is to lift the trophy.

With three titles to their name, the Japanese boast a strong record in the tournament, as do fellow triple champions Iran and Saudi Arabia. Although the Saudis missed out on qualification for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, it will be a major shock if they don't make an impression in Qatar – winners in 1984, 1988 and 1996, they have been in six of the last seven finals.

Australia will be thankful to have avoided those three giants in Group C, but Korea Republic may provide an even tougher test. The winner of the first two AFC Asian Cups, Korea Republic defied expectations in South Africa to qualify for the knockout stages, eventually losing narrowly to semi-finalist Uruguay. Korea Republic came out on top when the two nations last met in 2009, winning 3-1 in Seoul.

Before the heavyweight clash with the Koreans at Al Gharafa Stadium, the Qantas Socceroos will kick off their campaign against India. One of the lowest-ranked countries in the tournament, India gained automatic qualification for Qatar by winning the 2008 AFC Challenge Cup.

Australia will be much more familiar with its third and final group opponent – Bahrain. The nations have met four times in recent years, in qualification for the AFC Asian Cup and FIFA World Cup, and the Qantas Socceroos have won all four

The Bahrainis, though, will be no pushovers. They cruised through their qualification group, beating Japan along the way, and almost reached the 2010 FIFA World Cup, losing to surprise packet New Zealand.

Australia will need its full squad if it is to become the eighth nation to lift the trophy. In 2007, Iraq caused a sensation to win the tournament for the first time, a shock win that will provide hope for all the 16 competing nations in Qatar.

Aside from the defending champion and the traditional heavyweights, look out for Syria and China which both qualified strongly, Korea DPR – one of the four Asian representatives in South Africa – and Kuwait, which stunned Australia in the qualification stage with a 1-0 win in Canberra.

With the top two teams advancing from each group, the Qantas Socceroos will be confident of reaching the knockout phase, where they would play one of Iran, Iraq, Korea DPR or UAE. But previous experience will mean nothing is taken for granted. ●

DEFENDING CHAMPION
Iraq won the AFC Asian Cup 2007

AFC ASIAN CUP 2011 FIXTURES

*All times and dates according to Qatar time.

GROUP PHASE

GROUP A: QATAR, UZBEKISTAN, CHINA, KUWAIT

TEAMS	VENUE	DATE	TIME
Qatar v Uzbekistan	Khalifa Stadium	January 7	7.15pm
Kuwait v China	Al Gharafa Stadium	January 8	4.15pm
Uzbekistan v Kuwait	Al Gharafa Stadium	January 12	4.15pm
China v Qatar	Khalifa Stadium	January 12	7.15pm
Qatar v Kuwait	Khalifa Stadium	January 16	7.15pm
China v Uzbekistan	Al Gharafa Stadium	January 16	7.15pm

GROUP B: SAUDI ARABIA, JAPAN, JORDAN, SYRIA

TEAMS	VENUE	DATE	TIME
Japan v Jordan	Qatar Sports Club Stadium	January 9	4.15pm
Saudia Arabia v Syria	Al Rayyan Stadium	January 9	7.15pm
Jordan v Saudi Arabia	Al Rayyan Stadium	January 13	4.15pm
Syria v Japan	Qatar Sports Club Stadium	January 13	7.15pm
Saudi Arabia v Japan	Al Rayyan Stadium	January 17	4.15pm
Jordan v Syria	Qatar Sports Club Stadium	January 17	4.15pm

GROUP C: KOREA REPUBLIC, AUSTRALIA, BAHRAIN, INDIA

TEAMS	VENUE	DATE	TIME
India v Australia	Al Sadd Stadium	January 10	4.15pm
Korea Republic v Bahrain	Al Gharafa Stadium	January 10	7.15pm
Australia v Korea Republic	Al Gharafa Stadium	January 14	4.15pm
Bahrain v India	Al Sadd Stadium	January 14	7.15pm
Korea Republic v India	Al Gharafa Stadium	January 18	4.15pm
Australia v Bahrain	Al Sadd Stadium	January 18	4.15pm

GROUP D: IRAQ, IRAN, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, KOREA DPR

TEAMS	VENUE	DATE	TIME
Korea DPR v United Arab Emirates	Qatar Sports Club Stadium	January 11	4.15pm
Iraq v Iran	Al Rayyan Stadium	January 11	7.15pm
Iran v Korea DPR	Qatar Sports Club Stadium	January 15	4.15pm
United Arab Emirates v Iraq	Al Rayyan Stadium	January 15	7.15pm
Iraq v Korea DPR	Al Rayyan Stadium	January 19	7.15pm
United Arab Emirates v Iran	Qatar Sports Club Stadium	January 19	7.15pm

KNOCKOUT PHASE

Quarter-finals

1 Winner Grp B v Runner-up Grp A
Al Gharafa Stadium
January 21, 4.25pm

2 Winner Grp A v Runner-up Grp B
Khalifa Stadium
January 21, 7.25pm

3 Winner Grp C v Runner-up Grp D
Al Sadd Stadium
January 22, 4.25pm

4 Winner Grp D v Runner-up Grp C
Qatar Sports Club Stadium
January 22, 7.25pm

Semi-finals

1 Winner QF2 v Winner QF4
Al Gharafa Stadium
January 25, 4.25pm

2 Winner QF1 v Winner QF3
Khalifa Stadium
January 25, 7.25pm

Third-place play-off

Loser SF1 v Loser SF2
Al Sadd Stadium
January 28, 6pm

Final

Winner SF1 v Winner SF2
Khalifa Stadium
January 29, 6pm

CONTENDER
Japan, with Keisuke Honda, will challenge for the Cup.

AUSSIES ABROAD

All the latest news on Australians overseas. BY JOHN MURRAY

Australian players in the northern hemisphere have become accustomed to packing their bags in the European summer. First to go on a well-deserved break after a long season, and then a trip of a more permanent nature – to another club. Mark Schwarzer, Lucas Neill, Harry Kewell and Vincenzo Grella are just a handful of big-name Qantas Socceroos to have switched teams in recent seasons.

Yet, the 2010-11 off-season was notable for the fact that barely any of the star Australian players partook in the European merry-go-round.

In fact, the biggest story was that the Qantas Socceroos' No. 1 goalkeeper didn't go anywhere. Now in the twilight of his career, Schwarzer was keen to leave Fulham for the chance to win some silverware, and Arsenal was keen for a new keeper. It seemed the perfect match, but new Cottagers boss Mark Hughes was desperate to hang on to the veteran stopper, and despite several reported bids from the Gunners, the transfer did not materialise.

STAYING PUT
Arsenal failed in its bid to secure Mark Schwarzer.

To his credit, Schwarzer retained a dignified silence after the move was scuppered and, having shrugged off a back injury, regained his place in the Fulham goal ahead of David Stockdale, whose tremendous early season form had put him in contention for an England call-up. There is still a possibility that the Gunners will renew their interest in Schwarzer in the January transfer window

One Qantas Socceroos goalkeeper on the move, however, was Bradley Jones, who left Middlesbrough for Liverpool in August. And while most of the star names stayed put, there were still some Australian internationals who found new homes.

Mark Bresciano had known for several months that he would be playing at a new club in 2010-11 after Palermo had made it clear earlier in the year it would not renew his contract. The classy midfielder stayed in Italy after signing with Lazio, his fourth Serie A team.

David Carney, another member of Australia's 2010 FIFA World Cup campaign, returned to England when he joined Premiership new boys Blackpool. The skilful left wing-back had been part of the FC Twente squad that won the Dutch Eredivisie title last season, but struggled to hold down a first-team spot.

In August, Carney won the Dutch Super Cup as FC Twente defeated Ajax 1-0 in August, and attracted interest from English and Italian clubs. The chance to play in the Premiership proved irresistible, and he moved to Blackpool on transfer deadline day for an undisclosed fee Huge favourites for relegation before the season started, the

Barely any of the star Australian players took part in the European merry-go-round.

Seasiders made a stunning start to the campaign, and Carney played his first game in the shock 2-0 win over Newcastle in September.

Luke Carney, Nikita Rukavytsya has had more than his fair share of clubs recently. Unbelievably, in the past 18 months, the Ukrainian born striker has played for four different teams – from Perth Glory to FC Twente, then on loan to KSV Roeselare, and now to Hertha BSC

It was at Belgian club Roeselare where he caught the eye, scoring five goals in 14 games in an ultimately failed bid to stave off relegation to the second tier. There followed a couple of appearances at the 2010 FIFA World Cup, and before long, Rukavytsya was off to another country when German side Hertha BSC came calling.

Other Australians on the move included Jon McKain and Adam Griffiths, who both left their Hyundai A-League clubs. McKain, who recently celebrated a return to the Qantas Socceroos squad, joined Al Nassr in Saudi Arabia, while Griffiths switched to Hangzhou Greentown in China, where his brothers Joel and Ryan play for Beijing Guoan.

Tim Cahill, meanwhile, has been doing just fine where he is. Australia's leading scorer in FIFA World Cup history, the Everton star has a knack for scoring goals at crucial times.

ON TARGET
Tim Cahill has made a strong start to the new English season, scoring against Manchester United in September.

And that was once again the case when Manchester United visited Goodison Park in September.

The Red Devils were cruising with a 3-1 lead as the match entered injury time, but then came the Cahill show. First, he powered a header past Edwin van der Sar to halve the deficit, then on the Toffees' next attack, another header set up Mikel Arteta for the unlikeliest of equalisers

Harry Kewell was also on target last month when he scored the game's only goal for Galtasaray against Gaziantepspor from the penalty spot

Unfortunately, Kewell and teammate Lucas Neill will have to concentrate on domestic competitions in Turkey this season as their side was bundled out of the Europa League on away goals by Ukrainian outfit Karpaty in August.

ALREADY AT HOME
Nikita Rukavytsya, left, has made an impression with new side Hertha BSC.

Australians whose clubs feature in the group stages of this competition include: Nathan Burns (AEK Athens), Brett Holman and James Holland (AZ Alkmaar), Mitch Langerak (Borussia Dortmund), and Tommy Oar, Adam Sarota and Michael Zullo (FC Utrecht)

All will jump at the chance to appear on the big stage, but it is in the UEFA Champions League that every European-based footballer wants to play. Recently retired Qantas Socceroo Scott Chipperfield has previously appeared in Europe's elite competition with FC Basel, and will do so again this season.

Now in his 10th year in Switzerland, Chipperfield has reaped the rewards of staying with the same club for the bulk of his career, winning enough trophies to fill a cabinet. The Swiss champions will be hoping to emulate their success of 2002-03 when they reached the second group stage at the expense of Liverpool ●

From Middlesbrough to Merseyside

Bradley Jones had spent more than a third of his life with Middlesbrough, but when Liverpool came calling in August, it was too good a move to turn down.

After 10 seasons on Teeside, the 28-year-old goalkeeper said goodbye to the English Championship and returned to the Premiership with a club 170 kilometres down the road. New Reds boss Roy Hoggson fought off rumoured competition from Arsenal to sign the Australian topper for a reported fee of $4 million.

His move to Merseyside completed, Jones faces a major battle to dislodge Jose Reina in between the sticks – a situation he knows all too well having served as Mark Schwarzer's understudy for several years on Teeside. Reina has made a typically solid start to the 2010-11 season and was in particularly strong form against Birmingham last month.

On the plus side, Jones at least appears to be at the front of the queue to replace the Spaniard should the opportunity present itself – he inherited Liverpool's No. 1 shirt after Diego Cavalieri switched to Italian side Cesena.

For now, it looks like Jones – who made his unofficial Liverpool debut against an Everton XI in Jamie Carragher's testimonial in September – will have to make the most of any chances he gets in the Europa League and domestic cup competitions.

A FRESH START
Brad Jones has joined Liverpool after 10 years with Middlesbrough.

>>> ACTION REPLAY

SLOVENIJA AUSTRALIA

Slovenia vs. QANTAS SOCCEROOS

Slovenia proved too strong for the Qantas Socceroos in their first match since the 2010 FIFA World Cup. BY JOHN MURRAY

Exactly one month after Spaniard Andres Iniesta scored the only goal of the 2010 FIFA World Cup final, the Qantas Socceroos set to put their South African disappointment behind them with their first international outing since the tournament – a friendly against Slovenia in Ljubljana.

It was always going to be a tough test against a nation that came within a whisker of progressing to the FIFA World Cup knockout stages, and so it proved as late goals from substitutes Zlatko Dedic and Zlatan Ljubijankic earned a 2-0 win.

The Australian team had a familiar feel, with Bruce Djite and Jade North the only two new faces in the starting line-up who didn't feature in South Africa. Experienced trio Tim Cahill, Brett Emerton and Harry Kewell missed the game, while veterans Craig Moore and Scott Chipperfield were also absent, having announced their retirements at the end of Australia's 2010 FIFA World Cup campaign

There was also a change on the sidelines. After Pim Verbeek departed in June to take up a position with Morocco's national youth teams, it was left to FFA Technical Director Hans Berger to handle the coaching duties. Holger Osieck – confirmed as the Qantas Socceroos' new coach earlier in the day - watched from the stands.

Slovenia threatened from the outset, with Mark Schwarzer keeping out efforts from Tim Matavz and Andraz Kirm in the opening half hour, while Milivoje Novakovic squandered another opportunity.

At the other end, Brett Holman was the Qantas Socceroos' most dangerous attacking outlet. Their best chance fell to Djite after an error by goalkeeper Samir Handanovic from Mile Jedinak's cross. The ball fell to the feet of the Gold Coast United striker, but he put his shot wide.

Berger made several changes in the second half, with Adam Federici replacing Schwarzer and Nathan Burns, Dario Vidosic and James Holland featuring as the game wore on. Despite the substitutions, Slovenia continued to dominate with Australia regularly giving away possession

With 12 minutes remaining, the home side, which had a staggering 27 attempts at goal, finally made the breakthrough when Dedic headed Miso Brecko's cross into the corner of the net

Minutes later, Lucas Neill had a chance to level the scores. David Carney picked out the Australian captain from a free kick, but the defender sliced the ball wide

Neill might still have been thinking about that miss when he gave away possession at the other end to Ljubijankic, who beat Federici with a fine long-range drive to the delight of the crowd of 16,155.

ARENA STOŽICE, LJUBLJANA, AUGUST 12, 2010

Slovenia	2 (Dedic 78', Ljubijankic 90')
Qantas Socceroos	0

TOUGH NIGHT Luke Wilkshire, left, fends off Solvenia's Andraz Kirm during Australia's 2-0 loss

>>> ACTION REPLAY

Switzerland vs. QANTAS SOCCEROOS

AUSTRALIA

Mark Schwarzer won the plaudits yet again as Holger Osieck made a solid start to his Qantas Socceroos coaching career.

BY JOHN MURRAY

When the day finally comes that Mark Schwarzer hangs up his international gloves, Australian football will be much the poorer. The veteran custodian has saved the blushes of his nation on countless occasions, and he produced yet another sterling performance as the Qantas Socceroos held out Switzerland in St Gallen last month.

As a result, Holger Osieck – in his first match in charge – joined a long list of Qantas Socceroos coaches who have been indebted to the goalkeeper.

Schwarzer made a series of outstanding stops, particularly in the second half, while the Swiss also squandered a penalty, to help the Qantas Socceroos come away from this international friendly with a creditable 0-0 draw.

There were two noticeable additions to Osieck's starting line-up, with Matthew Spiranovic coming in at centre back and Scott McDonald – who missed out on Pim Verbeek's squad for South Africa – leading the line.

McDonald failed to break his international scoring duck, but it was always going to be a formidable challenge against the sturdy Swiss defence, which leaked just one goal in three games at the 2010 FIFA World Cup

Switzerland might have a reputation for being less than adventurous, but there was an energetic start to the game, with both sides missing glorious opportunities. First, Lucas Neill blazed over with the goal at his mercy and, shortly afterwards, Albert Bunjaku escaped the Australian defence only to be denied by Schwarzer from point-blank range

With the Qantas Socceroos having plenty of possession and looking dangerous on the counter-attack, Tim Cahill and Brett Holman also came close to breaking the deadlock, but both their efforts were blocked.

The home side, encouraged by a vociferous crowd of 14,660, took control in the second half. Full-backs Stephan Lichtsteiner and Gelson Fernandes provided strong attacking outlets on the flanks, as the Swiss created a host of chances

Schwarzer, however, was equal to them all. He made three reflex saves as his goal came under siege, at one point stretching to tip Xavier Margairaz's volley around the post

It seemed nothing could beat the inspired keeper, but the Swiss were handed a gilt-edged chance just before the hour mark when Neill knocked over David Degen in the penalty area. Alexander Frei, the Swiss captain and star striker, could not control his penalty, firing it high and wide of the right-hand post.

Margairaz had a chance to steal the game at the death, but that would have been cruel to Schwarzer on what was another inspirational night.

AFG ARENA, ST GALLEN, SEPTEMBER 1, 2010	
Switzerland	0
Qantas Socceroos	0

PITCH BATTLE
Matthew Spiranovic, left, fights for possession with Switzerland's Eren Derdiyok during the goalless draw

>>> ACTION REPLAY

Poland vs. QANTAS SOCCEROOS

Brett Holman played a starring role as Australia scored an encouraging win against Poland in Krakow. BY JOHN MURRAY

If Holger Osieck is seeking a new hero to kick-start his time in charge of the Qantas Socceroos, then Brett Holman might just be the man. Holman was on the field for just half an hour of last month's friendly against Poland but, in that time, he did enough to help Australia on its way to a 2-1 win – the first for Osieck as coach.

Luke Wilkshire was also on target from the spot, while Adam Federici saved a penalty, as the Qantas Socceroos earned a morale boosting victory at the Wisla Krakow Stadium.

Osieck made four changes to the team that had held Switzerland to a goalless draw four days earlier, with Federici, Jon McKain, Richard Garcia and Mile Jedinak coming into the side. Mark Schwarzer, Jason Culina, Matthew Spiranovic and Brett Emerton made way. Used as a substitute, Emerton's night ended on a sour note when he was dismissed for two bookable offences with 20 minutes still on the clock.

Fresh from netting twice in the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Holman took just 14 minutes to find the target in Krakow, sweeping home Wilkshire's cutback after good work from Lucas Neill in the build up.

That goal came against the run of play, after the Poles had looked threatening in the opening exchanges. And it took just four minutes for the home side to get back on level terms when Robert Lewandowksi got on the end of a left wing cross to fire past Federici.

Once again, it was time for Holman to take centre stage. His wonderful through ball sent Garcia clear in the Polish penalty area, only to be cut down by skipper Michal Zewlakow. Wilkshire had no problems in sending keeper Przemyslaw Tyton the wrong way from the spot. Shortly afterwards, Holman went down with a calf injury which required Osieck to replace him with Emerton.

It was a frantic opening half, and the action wasn't finished there, as the Poles were soon gifted a glorious chance to draw level again. McKain, playing his first international for four years, brought down Jakub Blaszczykowski and referee Ivan Bebek awarded a second penalty within 10 minutes.

Perhaps inspired by Schwarzer's stunning performance against Switzerland, Federici rose to the challenge, diving to his left to keep out Lewandowksi's weak effort.

The Reading keeper had plenty more work to do as Poland piled on the pressure in the second half. But despite having a one-man advantage in the closing stages, the Poles couldn't find a way past Federici.

WISLA KRAKOW STADIUM, KRAKOW, SEPTEMBER 8, 2010	
Poland	1 (Lewandowksi 18')
Qantas Socceroos	2 (Holman 14', Wilkshire 24')

ON TARGET
Brett Holman drives home the opening goal against Poland in Krakow.

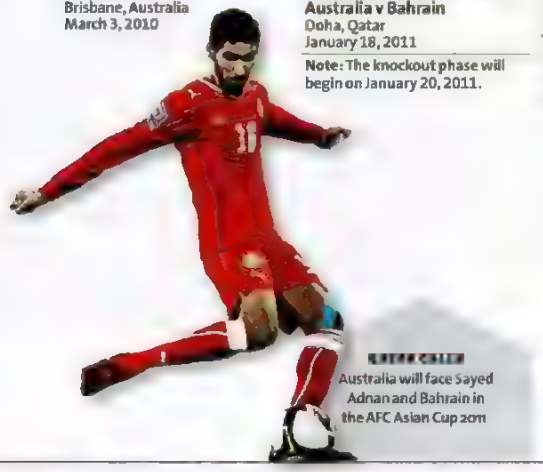
RESULTS & FIXTURES

Qantas Socceroos' results and fixtures from 2010–11. *All dates according to Australia Eastern Standard Time.

AFC ASIAN CUP 2011 QUALIFIERS

Kuwait 2
Australia 2
Kuwait City, Kuwait
January 6, 2010

Australia 1
Indonesia 0
Brisbane, Australia
March 3, 2010



UP NEXT
Australia will face Sayed Adnan and Bahrain in the AFC Asian Cup 2011

AFC ASIAN CUP 2011 GROUP B

India v Australia
Doha, Qatar
January 10, 2011

Australia v Korea Republic
Doha, Qatar
January 14, 2011

Australia v Bahrain
Doha, Qatar
January 18, 2011

Note: The knockout phase will begin on January 20, 2011.

2010 FIFA WORLD CUP GROUP D

Germany 4
Australia 0
Durban, South Africa
June 14, 2010

Ghana 1
Australia 1
Rustenburg, South Africa
June 20, 2010

Australia 2
Serbia 1
Nelspruit, South Africa
June 24, 2010

INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLIES

Australia 2
New Zealand 1
Melbourne, Australia
May 24, 2010

Australia 1
Denmark 0
Roodepoort, South Africa
June 1, 2010

Australia 1
USA 3
Roodepoort, South Africa
June 5, 2010

Slovenia 2
Australia 0
Ljubljana, Slovenia
August 12, 2010

Switzerland 0
Australia 0
St Gallen, Switzerland
September 4, 2010

Poland 1
Australia 2
Krakow, Poland
September 7, 2010

Australia v Paraguay
Sydney, Australia
October 9, 2010

Germany v Australia
Mönchengladbach, Germany
March 30, 2011

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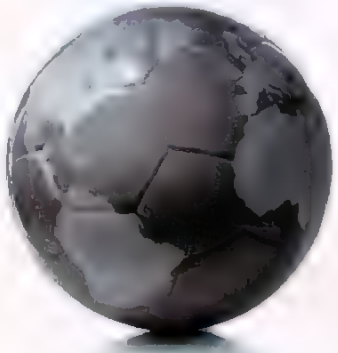

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ON THE SPOT

Test your knowledge and skills

Reckon you know a thing or two about the Qantas Socceroos? Take this quiz and all will be revealed.

1 Which was the last South American country to beat Australia?
A. Argentina
B. Brazil
C. Uruguay

2 Which club did new Qantas Socceroos coach Holger Osieck lead to victory in the AFC Champions League 2007?
A. Pohang Steelers
B. Beijing Guoan
C. Urawa Red Diamonds

3 How many players from Australia's 2010 FIFA World Cup squad started against Slovenia in August?
A. 9
B. 10
C. 11

4 How many goals did the Qantas Socceroos score in the 2010 FIFA World Cup?
A. 2
B. 3
C. 4

5 How many goals did the Qantas Socceroos concede in the 2010 FIFA World Cup?
A. 6
B. 7
C. 8

6 Who was the last Australian to coach the Qantas Socceroos?
A. Frank Farina
B. Graham Arnold
C. Les Scheinflug

7 Which nation from the Asian Football Confederation won the most games at the 2010 FIFA World Cup?
A. Korea Republic
B. Japan
C. Australia

KEWELL COLLEAGUE Is Mile Jedinak Harry Kewell's Aussie teammate at Galatasaray?

8 From which club did defender Michael Beauchamp join Melbourne Heart in 2010?
A. Melbourne Victory
B. FC Basel
C. Al-Jazira

9 Which Qantas Socceroo is captain of Gold Coast United?
A. Jason Culina
B. Jacob Burns
C. Jon McKain

10 Who scored the only goal for Australia against Denmark in June?
A. Tim Cahill
B. Luke Wilkshire
C. Josh Kennedy

11 Who was a late replacement for Brad Jones in Australia's 2010 FIFA World Cup squad?
A. Eugene Galekovic
B. Michael Petkovic
C. Mitch Langerak

12 Which Qantas Socceroo won the Dutch Eredivisie with FC Twente last season?
A. Brett Holman
B. David Carney
C. Nathan Burns

13 Who is Harry Kewell's Australian teammate at Galatasaray?
A. Lucas Neill
B. Mile Jedinak
C. Carl Valeri

14 In which city was Bruce Djite born?
A. Washington DC
B. Perth
C. London

15 Which Hyundai A-League club did Mile Jedinak play for from 2006-09?
A. Wellington Phoenix
B. Central Coast Mariners
C. Newcastle Jets

16 At what stage did the Qantas Socceroos exit the AFC Asian Cup 2007?
A. Group stage
B. Quarter-finals
C. Semi-finals

17 And who was Australia's top scorer in the tournament?
A. John Aloisi
B. Harry Kewell
C. Mark Viduka

18 Which English club did Tim Cahill leave to join Everton in 2004?
A. Watford
B. Millwall
C. QPR

19 Who scored Australia's goal in the 3-1 defeat to USA in June?
A. Tim Cahill
B. Harry Kewell
C. Brett Emerton

20 Who started in goal for Australia in the friendly against New Zealand in May?
A. Mark Schwarzer
B. Adam Federici
C. Brad Jones

FORMER HOME Which club did Michael Beauchamp leave to join Melbourne Heart?

BY THE STATS

Qantas Socceroos statistics

SUCCESSFUL REIGN
Pim Verbeek's stint as Qantas Socceroos coach ended after the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the Dutchman leaving with a 55 per cent winning record.

1 FIFA World Cup won by new Qantas Socceroos coach Holger Osieck – as assistant coach of West Germany in 1990.

1 match in charge of the Qantas Socceroos for FFA technical director Hans Berger against Slovenia in August before the appointment of Holger Osieck.

1 goal scored by Tony Popovic when Australia last played Paraguay, in 2006.

2 goals for Brett Holman in the 2010 FIFA World Cup, against Ghana and Serbia.

3 different clubs, and countries, for Nikita Rukavytsya in 2010 – he moved on loan from FC Twente to Roeselare and was signed by Hertha Berlin in July.

3 goals for Tim Cahill in the FIFA World Cup – he is Australia's leading goalscorer in the history of the tournament.

4 points for the Qantas Socceroos in the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

5 years since Australia beat a South American opponent, the 1-0 win against Uruguay in November 2005.

6 defeats for Australia in Pim Verbeek's time in charge, from 2008-10.

15 years since Craig Moore – who announced his retirement in July – made his debut for Australia against Ghana.

19 different Australian players took the field at the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

55 per cent winning record for the Qantas Socceroos under Pim Verbeek (18 wins from 33 games).

62 years, the age of Holger Osieck.

63 appearances for Australia by Scott Chipperfield, who retired from international football after the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

4.2 million, the reported fee (in Australian dollars) paid by Liverpool to Middlesbrough for goalkeeper Brad Jones.

LOYAL SERVANT
Scott Chipperfield retired after representing Australia 63 times.

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FINAL WHISTLE

First Asia, now the world

On the back of their victory in the 2010 AFC Women's Asian Cup, the Westfield Matildas are confident of further success in Germany next year. BY JOHN MURRAY

Germany will always hold a special place in the heart of Australian football.

In 1974, it was Germany – or at least the western part of it – where Australia participated in its first FIFA World Cup. Rale Rasic's side might have failed to advance from the group stage, but it remained an historic achievement for the sport in this country.

There is genuine hope the Westfield Matildas can go deep into the 2011 FIFA World Cup.

Thirty-two years later, the Qantas Socceroos were back for their second stab at the biggest tournament on the planet, which happened to be on German soil again. This time, they made the most of their opportunity, as Tim Cahill, Harry Kewell and co. brought football back into the national conscience.

Next year, there will be another FIFA World Cup, Germany will be the host, but on this occasion it will be the women's turn to shine. And while the Qantas Socceroos suffered an early exit from the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, there is genuine hope that the Westfield Matildas can go deep into the tournament next June and July.

Expectations have soared after Australia won the 2010 AFC Women's Asian Cup in May. Competing in the tournament for the second time, the Westfield Matildas beat Vietnam and Korea Republic in the group stage before losing to host nation China with qualification already in the bag. Then followed a hard-fought 1-0 semi-final win over Japan to book a meeting with Korea DPR in the final.

GERMAN CONQUEST
The Westfield Matildas are hoping to celebrate more success in next year's FIFA World Cup.

On a rainy, humid night in Chengdu, Sam Kerr gave the Australians the lead in the 19th minute, only for the Koreans to equalise with 17 minutes remaining. After the deadlock could not be broken in extra time, the match had to be decided by penalties. Following a miss from Yun Song Mi, Kyah Simon slotted the decisive penalty to seal a dramatic victory for Tom Sermanni's team.

That result – Australia's first major silverware since joining the Asian Football Confederation – meant the Westfield Matildas qualified for the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup, together with Korea DPR and third-placed Japan.

It will be the sixth time the competition has been staged and, as two-time defending champion, the home nation will be the team to beat. Not all of the 16 final qualifiers have been confirmed, with the draw to be held in December, but the USA and Brazil, the world's first and third-ranked teams, will also fancy their chances. As will the European contingent – France, England, 1995 winner Norway and 2003 runner-up Sweden, who booked their spots in September.

For Australia, it will be a fifth consecutive appearance in the tournament. Four years ago in China, the Westfield Matildas enjoyed their best performance when they were edged out 3-2 by Brazil in the quarter-finals.

Can they go even further next year? There's every chance. Fresh from their success in Asia, the Australians moved up to 11th in the latest FIFA world rankings – their highest position – while Korea DPR and Japan, the two vanquished opponents in May, are entrenched in the top 10.

The move to Asia has certainly helped the national team, as has the development of the Westfield W-League, which will begin its third season in November. Many of the Australian internationals compete in this league, and it is hoped that as the competition grows, more talent will emerge.

"Australia's move into the AFC has made more competitive matches available to our women's teams," Leeanne Grantham, the FFA's Head of Women's Football, said recently.

"Playing tougher opponents has been a positive step forward in our players' development and this can be seen from yet another important moment in Australian women's football."

"The Westfield W-League has also assisted in this result as this elite pathway for our female players has created more competition for places and has allowed more players to be identified to enter our National Teams programs."

Speaking after the world rankings were released in August, Sermanni, who has coached the national team since 2005, said the hard work put into the domestic game was paying off.

"It's always going to be tougher for teams in more isolated countries to progress quickly in these type of ranking systems," he said.

"But we aim to continue to improve and, although we remain cautious at this stage to have any specific targets, this is another strong indication that the work we are doing in women's football in Australia is seeing results."

And if the most spectacular result of all ensues next year, there would be no more fitting place for Australia to celebrate the triumph than Germany.

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